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THE TRIUMPHS OF

Christianity over Infidelity displayed,

OR THE COMING OF

THE MESSIAH,

THE TRUE KEY

TO THE RIGHT UNDERSTANDING OF THE MOST DIFFICULT PASSAGES IN THE

NEW TESTAMENT;

VIZ.

OF THE PREDICTIONS OF THE COMING OF CHRIST,
OF ST. PAUL'S MAN OF SIN,
OF THE ANTICHRIST OF ST. JOHN, AND
OF THE SURE WORD OF PROPHECY OF ST. PETER;

BEING

A FULL ANSWER TO THE OBJECTION OF

MR. GIBBON,

THAT OUR LORD AND HIS APOSTLES PREDICTED THE NEAR APPROACH OF THE END OF THE WORLD IN THEIR OWN TIME.

The Whole being intended as an Illustration of the Necessity and Importance of

Considering the Gospels as Histories,

AND PARTICULARLY

As Histories of the great Controversy between our LORD and the JEWS,

CONCERNING THE

TRUE NATURE OF THE MESSIAH's CHARACTER.

By N. NISBETT, A.M.

Other Foundation can no Man lay than that which is laid, JESUS THE CHRIST—*or* THE MESSIAH. *We have not followed cunningly devised Fables when we made known to you the Power and Coming of* OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST.

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PREFACE.

FROM a perusal of the Title Page, and of the Table of Contents of the Work which is here offered to the public Attention, it will appear that the Subjects treated of in it, are of no mean or trifling importance, but that they relate to the most essential Interests of Christianity, and to the Manner in which the New Testament is to be understood.

As they are many of them viewed in a light very different from that in which they have hitherto been viewed by the generality of Christians—the Author most earnestly wishes they may be scrutinized with the utmost severity of genuine Criticism; for as the ascertaining the true Meaning of the Sacred Writers and the rescueing them from the suspicion of their having predicted a Falsehood, is his first Object; he shall feel equal pleasure in receiving information from others, and in retracting his own Opinion when it shall be made to appear that he is mistaken.

The

The Writers, from whom it has been the Author's misfortune to differ, are many of them numbered among the Dead, and are therefore unable to defend themselves—but there are Those still living whose Learning and Abilities are equally respectable, and who are equally competent to detect any Errors into which he may have inadvertently fallen. From them he neither asks, nor expects any other quarter than what a candid and ingenuous Opponent will always be ready to give: And he is confident they will not, unnecessarily, wound the feelings of one, who has been ardently solicitous to establish, on the most solid basis, the credit of the Christian Religion, from a firm conviction, if full justice is done to it, that it is worthy of all Acceptation.

The Author begs leave to add, that his first object having been to endeavor to understand the New Testament himself; if he hath succeeded in obtaining a more accurate knowledge of it, than those who have gone before him; it is not owing to superior advantages of situation; still less, to superior learning and abilities. Indeed he cannot help considering it as one considerable argument in favor of Christianity, that it requires, not so much, a superior depth of learning, as an attentive perusal of it as an History, *and particularly, as an History of the great Controversy between Jesus*

and

and the Jews, concerning the true nature of the Messiah's Character. *Viewing it in this light, discoveries have gradually been made by him, of which he had no conception, particularly with respect to St. Paul's Man of Sin, and the Antichrist of St. John. And he is firmly persuaded, that if the same plan is faithfully pursued; it will be followed by discoveries, still more important and satisfactory!*

ASH, 7th August, 1802.

THE

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ERRATA.

In Page 1 line 6 from the bottom, instead of, in their behaviour, read, in the behaviour of his opponents to be, &c.

5 line 18 of the Note, read, metaphysical questions; instead of metaphysical disquisition questions;

9 The inverted commas to the last nine lines of the Note should have been omitted

34 line 23, read, *kingdom of Heaven*, instead of *kingdom Heaven*.

35 line 29, read, Mosaic, instead of Mosiac

54 line 20, read, attended as *an History*, instead of, attended to as *an History*

76 line 22, read, shun'd not to tell, instead of, shun'd not tell

126 line 12, read adapts, instead of, adopts

THE

TRIUMPHS OF

CHRISTIANITY over INFIDELITY;

OR

THE TRUE SCRIPTURE DOCTRINE

Of the COMING of CHRIST.

WHEN Chriſtianity was firſt made known to the world, its divine Author delivered his doctrines and exhibited the Proofs of his Miſſion with unaffected ſimplicity. Satisfied of the intrinſic excellence of the one and of the clearneſs and evidence of the other, he left them to produce their own effects upon the minds of his hearers, without attempting to illuſtrate that excellence, or to ſhew that thoſe proofs were proper and concluſive. The very intelligent and ingenious Dr. Gerard, in his Diſſertations on the Genius and the Evidences of Chriſtianity has, with great propriety, termed this, Our Lord's original manner; from which it does not appear that he ever deviated, but when oppoſition made it neceſſary. When, however, Objections were formed againſt his Religion, he did not think it beneath the dignity of his Character to engage in its defence and to employ the powers of reaſoning, with a view to expoſe the weakneſs of thoſe Objections and the unreaſonableneſs of an oppoſition to him. Nor does it appear that, in any one inſtance, he expreſſed the ſmalleſt diſpleaſure at an inquiſitive turn of mind, when under the direction of an unfeigned regard to Truth. It was only when an inſidious and captious ſpirit were too ſtrongly marked in their behaviour to be miſtaken, that ſuch a conduct fell under his reprehenſion. And even then, there are not wanting inſtances, when the cauſe of truth required it, of his replying to their Objections and entering into a full vindication of his conduct. So far indeed was Our Lord from requiring an implicit faith in his followers

 that

that he directed them *to ſearch the Scriptures* and to examine for themſelves, whether his doctrines were founded on truth, or were the fictions of an artful and deſigning Impoſtor. The ſame liberality of mind, moſt evidently actuated his Apoſtles, in general, and particularly the Apoſtle Peter, when he directed the Chriſtian Converts from among the Gentiles, *to give a reaſon of the hope that was in them* and, *in the Spirit of meekneſs*, in oppoſition to a dogmatical and tyrannical Spirit, *to inſtruct thoſe who oppoſed the Chriſtian faith*. As therefore a candid and ingenuous ſtatement of any objections to *the truth of Chriſtianity* was not, and indeed could not, if their Miſſion was from heaven and their language had any meaning in it, have been offenſive to Our Saviour himſelf, or to his Apoſtles; it will neceſſarily and unavoidably follow, that it ought not to be diſpleaſing to any of its friends who come after them, from whatever quarter it may ariſe.

The learned Author juſt mentioned has well obſerved that "the excellence of Chriſtianity could not poſſibly have been "attained, if Chriſt and his Apoſtles had not met with "oppoſition," and that "all the indications of truth which "it implies, may be juſtly aſcribed, in a great meaſure, to "the Oppoſition of Infidels. If none had raiſed objections "againſt the divine miſſion of Jeſus, he and his Apoſtles muſt "have either confined themſelves to *their original manner* of "ſimply exhibiting evidence, or they muſt have *ſpontaneouſly* "illuſtrated and vindicated the evidence. If they had choſen "the former, their manner would have indeed contained "ſeveral preſumptions of the truth of Chriſtianity, but it "would have been in ſome reſpects, lame and imperfect, and "all the advantages ariſing from their reaſonings, would have "been loſt. If they had preferred the latter, this would have "deſtroyed all thoſe proofs of their Miſſion, which reſult "from the ſimplicity of their original manner. It would "have likewiſe rendered their reaſonings of leſs weight "than they now are. Oppoſition gives the moſt natural "occaſion of anſwering the objections to which that evidence "is liable. It enables a perſon to introduce illuſtrations "and defences without any appearance of deſign or artifice. "It put it in the power of our Saviour to ſupport and "vindicate his claim, by argument, as often as any good "purpoſe required; and by giving as many opportunities for "this, as were neceſſary, it left him at liberty, in *all* his

"ordinary

" ordinary addreſſes to Men, to purſue that original manner
" which is ſo full of divinity. It made way for a delicate
" union of oppoſite manners in oppoſite ſituations, which
" beſtows on his whole manner a degree of perfection,
" and conſequently beſtows on his religion a brightneſs of
" evidence, unattainable by any other means. Thus the
" aſſaults of ancient infidels contributed greatly to the
" confirmation of Chriſtianity, merely by the influence which
" they had on the manner of its author in propoſing the
" proofs of it. But this, though very conſiderable, is not
" the only advantage reſulting from them. This advantage is
" peculiar to the oppoſition of the contemporaries of Jeſus:
" but the ſame prejudices and vices which produced that
" oppoſition, moved ſucceeding unbelievers in the early ages, to
" contrive new Objections againſt the goſpel, or to repeat the
" former ones. Theſe too have been the occaſion of throwing
" new light upon the evidences of our religion, and of
" rendering their ſtrength more conſpicuous.

" The oppoſition of modern Infidels muſt likewiſe be of very
" conſiderable advantage, as it has a very ſtrong tendency to
" make all ſenſible Chriſtians extremely cautious in chuſing
" their weapons—wary in examining the propriety of every
" principle on which they build—attentive to the ſoundneſs
" and ſtrength of every argument which they urge—ſcrupulous
" about the truth of every deduction which they make; in a
" word, careful that the defences which they offer for their
" religion be, in all reſpects beyond reaſonable exception. The
" Spirit of Infidelity fails not to lay hold of any weak arguments
" which are employed in defence of Chriſtianity. However
" ſparing unbelievers are, in undertaking a regular confutation
" of ſolid anſwers made to their Objections their writings
" ſhow, that they are not backward to make all the advantage
" poſſible of the miſtakes of Chriſtians. When Infidels are
" awake to obſerve theſe, Chriſtians come likewiſe to have
" a ſtrong motive to expoſe and rectify the falſe reaſonings of
" one another and to baniſh inconcluſive reaſonings from the
" defence of Chriſtianity." *

But notwithſtanding all the advantages which have ariſen to Chriſtianity from the oppoſition of Infidels, it is not to be denied that inſtead of extending its influence, it is evidently loſing ground. One of the moſt populous and extenſive

* See Gerard's Diſſertations, p. 309, &c.

Countries in Europe has openly abjured Chriſtianity as *an Impoſture* *. The ſeeds of Infidelity have, with incredible diligence been ſown, in Germany, in Italy, in the Low Countries, and even our own more highly favored Iſland has not eſcaped the Contagion. The learned Author of a ſeries of Sermons preached before the Univerſity of Cambridge has aſſerted that "the Objections which the celebrated Hiſtorian "of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire has revived "againſt the divine origin of our Religion, are acutely urged "and forcibly expreſſed," and that "their pernicious influence "is rendered laſting and extenſive, as they are not contained "in a detached and trivial production, but are inſerted in the "body

* "The Centre from which the Miſchief hath ſpread," ſays the learned Biſhop of Rocheſter, "is France. In that Kingdom the Myſtery of iniquity "began to work, ſomewhat earlier than the middle of the century which is "juſt paſſed away. Its machinations at firſt were ſecret, unperceived, "diſguiſed. Its inſtruments were perſons in no conſpicuous ſtations. But "by the perſevering zeal of an individual, who by an affectation of a depth "of univerſal learning which he never poſſeſſed; by audacity in the "circulation of what he knew to be falſified Hiſtory; by a counterfeit zeal "for toleration; but above all, by a certain brilliancy of unprincipled "wit, contrived to acquire a celebrity for his name and a deference to his "opinions, far beyond the proportion of what might be juſtly due either to "his talents or his attainments (though neither the one nor the other were "inconſiderable); by the perſevering zeal, I ſay, of this miſcreant, "throughout a long, though an infirm and ſickly life of bold active impiety, "a conſpiracy was formed of all the wit, the ſcience, the philoſophy, and "the politics, not of France only, but of many other countries, for the "extirpation of the Chriſtian name. The art, the induſtry, the diſguiſe, "the deep laid policy with which the nefarious plot was carried on, the "numbers of all ranks and deſcriptions which were drawn in to take part "in it, &c. are facts that are indeed aſtoniſhing. In this confederacy the "men of ſcience and letters certainly played the principal part. And with "ſo much earneſtneſs they played it, that for many years, nothing was done "in France for the improvement of Science, without a view to the diſſervice "of Religion. To this purpoſe every diſcovery was bent, every advancement "in learning was applied.

"From the middle of the Century to the period of the French Revolution, "every great literary undertaking in that Kingdom, every conſiderable "publication upon whatever ſubject, Natural Philoſophy, Natural Hiſtory, "Chemiſtry, Anatomy, Morals, Law and Politics, was in ſome way or "other brought to bear, directly or indirectly, upon the great object of the "conſpiracy, the defamation and diſcredit of the Chriſtian Religion. "This was ſeldom indeed the immediate and avowed Object, but it was "a ſort of under-plot, if the expreſſion may be allowed, in every piece, to "which what appeared to be the main action was in truth ſubſervient. The "ſtratagem was in this part the more certain of ſucceſs, and of a wide "and

" body of a hiſtory, which can periſh only with the language " itſelf. But," he adds, " the force of truth will oblige us to " confeſs that in the attacks which have been levelled againſt " our Sceptical Hiſtorians, we can diſcover but ſlender traces " of profound and exquiſite erudition—of ſolid criticiſm and " accurate inveſtigation; but are too frequently diſguſted " by vague and inconcluſive reaſoning,—by unſeaſonable " banter and ſenſeleſs witticiſms—by unlettered bigotry and " enthuſiaſtic jargon,—by futile cavils and illiberal invectives." Having thus degraded the Advocates of Chriſtianity;—Of the Hiſtorian of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire he ſays, " Proud and elated by the weakneſs of " his Antagoniſts, he condeſcends not to handle the ſword " of controverſy, but darts forth the invenomed ſhafts of " ſarcaſtic ridicule: he approaches indeed the camp and *defies*

" and permanent effect, because many of the works, which has this tendency, " were performances of great merit in their avowed subjects, and for a long " time will be ſtandard books, among thoſe who apply themſelves to the " ſciences of which they treat. Thus they convey the poiſon in the moſt " unſuſpicious form; they have ſcattered it wide over the civilized world, " and they will tranſmit it to remote ages."

It may not, perhaps, be thought improper to preſent the Reader with one of the two inſtances which the learned Biſhop has ſelected in proof of his aſſertion, as it may poſſibly guard the Reader againſt the pernicious influence which might otherwiſe ariſe from the peruſal of it. " The famous " Encyclopedie," ſays he, " was undertaken by a knot of Atheiſts, at the " ſuggeſtion of the leader of the band, as a work which would prove highly " conducive to the ſucceſs of their plot, by the opportunities it would afford " them, in the way in which it was propoſed to them to manage it, in which " indeed they have managed it, of diſſeminating their own principles, of " bringing darkneſs, doubt, and uncertainty upon the firſt principles of " Religion and Morals, and of perplexing the inquiſitive mind with the " ſubtlety of diſmembered diſquiſition upon abſtruſe metaphyſical diſquiſition " queſtions; diſquiſition, not given altogether, but broken into parts, and " ſcattered, as it were, in fragments through the work; care being taken, " that what ſeems proved in one article ſhall ſeem to be confuted under " another; while the Reader is ſtudiouſly referred from the one to the other " of theſe contradictory articles; that, if he is a ſtudious enquirer after Truth, " he may derive nothing from the moſt diligent conſultation of theſe " omniſcient Volumes, but the torment of Doubt, Miſtruſt, and univerſal " Scepticiſm. Floundering in that muddy ocean for a certain length of time, " it will be well with him indeed, if its troubled waters float him not at laſt, " when his ſtrength is ſpent, to the dreary ſhores of Atheiſm. For, if a " Man, who has once believed in God, can but be brought to waver and " doubt in that belief, the end will generally be, that there will be no God " for him. To bring mankind in general, ſlily and unawares, to this ſtate, " was the object of the Encyclopedie." See Biſhop Horſley's Charge in the year 1800, pages 4—9.

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" *the armies of the living God:* yet he approaches not, like " Goliah, to call forth a Champion, but to inſult and triumph " over his vanquiſhed Enemies." *

Among other Objections which the Hiſtorian of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire has urged againſt the truth of Chriſtianity the learned Univerſity Preacher has, very properly, brought forward for public diſcuſſion, that which relates to *the coming of Chriſt*, as it certainly is, the moſt formidable and the moſt likely to make an impreſſion upon the mind of the Reader of any that can be named, in the whole hiſtory of religious controverſy. " In the primitive Church," ſays the Hiſtorian, " the influence of truth was very powerfully " ſtrengthened by an opinion which, however it may deſerve " reſpect for it uſefulneſs and antiquity, has not been found " to be agreeable to experience. It was univerſally believed " that *the end of the world* and the kingdom of heaven were " *at hand.* The near approach of this wonderful event had " been predicted by the Apoſtles; the tradition of it was " preſerved by their earlieſt diſciples and thoſe who underſtood, " in their literal ſenſe, the diſcourſes of Chriſt himſelf were " obliged to expect the ſecond and glorious coming of the " Son of Man in the clouds, before that generation was totally " extinguiſhed, which had beheld his humble condition upon " Earth. Yet," he adds, " the revolution of ſeventeen " Centuries has inſtructed us not to preſs too cloſely the " language of Prophecy and Revelation. But as long as, for " wiſe purpoſes, this error was permitted to ſubſiſt in the " Church, it was productive of the moſt ſalutary effects on " the faith and practice of Chriſtians, who lived in the awful " expectation of that moment when the globe itſelf and all the " various race of mankind ſhould tremble at the appearance of " their divine Judge." †

What renders this Objection the more formidable is, that it really contains nothing more than is to be met with in the Writings of Chriſtians themſelves, and of thoſe too, of no ſmall eminence for their knowledge of the ſacred Writings.

The learned Univerſity Preacher appears to have repreſented their opinions with great fairneſs and impartiality, ſo far as

* See Edwards's Sermon on the Jewiſh and Heathen Rejection of the Chriſtian Miracles, p. 4.

† See Gibbon's Hiſtory of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, Vol. I. pages 470, 471.

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they relate to that part of the charge which aſſerts that the Apoſtles predicted the *near approach of the end of the world.* "It may not," ſays he, "be thought wonderful that Baronius "and other Romaniſts, to avoid the application of the Man "of Sin, ſhould earneſtly contend that the ſpeedy appearance "of Chriſt was expected by the Apoſtles, (See Mede's Works, "p. 665); but it is ſomewhat remarkable that the Orthodox "Father of the celebrated Prelate who tranſlated Iſaiah, in a "treatiſe deſigned to confute a ſuppoſed latitudinarian, ſhould "aſſent to the validity of our Hiſtorian's Objection, by "confeſſing, without reſerve, that the Apoſtles were miſtaken. "(See Lowth's Vindication, &c. p. 52.). Grotius inſinuates, "that for wiſe purpoſes the pious deception was permitted to "take place;—(Gibbon, Vol. II. p. 301. See Grotius de "Veritat. lib. ii. § 6. Cleric. ad 1 Theſſ. v. 10.) And an "ingenious Profeſſor of our own Univerſity does not appear "extremely ſolicitous to relieve the Apoſtles from the "accuſation of Error. (See Dr. Watſon's Apology, p. 61.) "But how far theſe conceſſions may be founded on truth, "can be diſcovered only by an examination of thoſe Paſſages "which are uſually brought forward in the diſcuſſion of this "ſubject." *

In this examination, the learned Univerſity Preacher, with Dr. Watſon, is ſo far from being ſolicitous to relieve the Apoſtles from the accuſation of Error, that at the cloſe of it he ſays, "I have now completed the examination of thoſe "paſſages, which I intended to notice; others might be "added equally clear and determinate; but theſe which I have "ſelected ſeem abundantly ſufficient to eſtabliſh the juſtneſs "of Mr. Locke's opinion, (vide ad. 11. Cor. v. 3.) † that "the Apoſtles expected, in their own time, *the end of the* "*world* and the appearance of Chriſt. It becomes, therefore, "the Antagoniſt of our Hiſtorian, moſt earneſtly to conſider, "whether the real Intereſts of Chriſtianity would not be "more eſſentially promoted, by conceding the objection to his "Adverſary, than by vainly attempting to remove it. We

* See the Predictions of the Apoſtles concerning the end of the World. A Sermon preached before the Univerſity of Cambridge May 23, 1790, by Thomas Edwards, LL.D. pages 12, 13.

† Mr. Locke's Note here referred to, is as follows: "That the Apoſtle "looked on the coming of Chriſt as not far off, appears by what he ſays, "1 Theſſ. iv. 15. and v. 6. which Epiſtle was written some years before this. "See also to the same purpose, 1 Cor. i. 7. and vii. 29, 31. and x. 11. "Rom. xiii. 11, 12. Heb. x. 37.

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" need not be apprehenſive that any injurious conſequences " will ariſe from the conceſſion, for as our ingenious Profeſſor " very candidly acknowledges, (p. 64), the Apoſtles might, " ſurely, be proper witneſſes of the life and reſurrection of " Jeſus, though they were ignorant of the preciſe time when " he would come to judge the world *." And a very learned Writer, now living, ſpeaking upon this ſubject, in a private letter, ſays, " I cannot help thinking that the primitive " Chriſtians and, perhaps, even the Apoſtles, did expect *the* " *day of judgment* to be near at hand. I think that ſome of " St. Paul's expreſſions will hardly admit of any other " interpretation."

The other part of the charge of the Hiſtorian of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, viz. that " thoſe who " underſtood, in their literal ſenſe, the diſcourſes of Chriſt " himſelf, were obliged to expect the ſecond and glorious " coming of the Son of Man in the clouds before that " generation was totally extinguiſhed which had beheld his " humble condition upon Earth," is founded upon ſuch paſſages as the following, Matt. x. 23. *Ye ſhall not have gone over the cities of Iſrael till the Son of Man be come.*—xvi. 28. *There be ſome ſtanding here, which ſhall not taſte of death, till they ſee the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.* xxiv. 30. *They ſhall ſee the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven.* Luke xxi. 31, 32. *When ye ſee theſe things come to paſs, know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand. Verily I ſay unto you, This generation ſhall not paſs away till all be fulfilled.*

Upon this latter paſſage, the learned Univerſity Preacher quotes Dr. Sykes, as very readily allowing that, by *the kingdom of God*, we are here to underſtand, its glorious ſtate and perfection in a future world. And, he ſays himſelf, that " any " other interpretation would, indeed, be utterly groundleſs; " and that our Lord deciſively foretells that the generation " then exiſting ſhould not be totally extinguiſhed till it had " witneſſed his ſecond and glorious appearance in the clouds " of heaven." † Mr. Mede ſays, " I utterly deny that to be " the kingdom, viz. which took place at Chriſt's firſt coming, " our Saviour propheſies of, Luke xxi. 31. and anſwerably " in the other Goſpels:" And, in another place, he ſays that " the Church hath always grounded her faith of the *ſecond* " *coming* of Chriſt, upon thoſe paſſages in the Goſpels which

* See Edwards's Sermon on the Predictions of the Apoſtles, pages 35, 36.
† Ibid. pages 19—33.

" ſpeak

" ſpeak of *his coming in the clouds of heaven.*" * And, to mention no more, a Writer in the Theological Repoſitory, whoſe ſignature is Idiota, ſays, " We find it very evident " that our Lord is recorded by his Hiſtorians, Matthew, " Mark (xiii. 30.), and Luke, to have declared, that *his* " *ſecond coming* was one of thoſe events which would happen " during the lives of ſome of his Contemporaries. We find " ourſelves obliged to make this conceſſion, and let Mr. " Gibbon make every advantage of it that he can." †

If this be an impartial view of the preſent ſtate of the Controverſy concerning the doctrine of *the coming of Chriſt*, the obſervation of the learned Univerſity Preacher, already mentioned, cannot be very remote from the truth,—that the Hiſtorian of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, " Proud and elated by the weakneſs of his adverſaries, inſults " and triumphs over his vanquiſhed Enemies." ‡

To a perſon who attends to the ſtate of religious controverſy in the preſent age, it muſt be evident that the preſs teems with defences of Chriſtianity; many of which do the higheſt credit to the learning, the abilities, and the piety which they diſplay; but however meritorious and praiſe worthy, ſuch exertions, in the Chriſtian cauſe may be, they muſt loſe much of their intended effect, in converting the Unbeliever, while ſuch formidable objections to *the truth of Chriſtianity* appear, by the confeſſion of Chriſtians themſelves, to ſtand in their full force. Nor will the Believer himſelf be able to pay any attention to theſe objections, and return, with full ſatisfaction, to the peruſal of the ſacred Writings, while any doubt remains upon his mind, of the true meaning of thoſe paſſages upon which the Hiſtorian of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, has founded his Objections.

* See Mede's Works, Vol. II. p. 349, 306. Edit. 1650.

† See the Theol. Repoſit. Vol. VI. p. 162.

‡ See Edwards's Sermon on the Jewiſh and Heathen rejection of the Chriſtian Miracles, p. 4. " It is very remarkable that the Biſhop of Landaff " has paſſed over in ſilence, the objection of the Hiſtorian of the Decline and " Fall of the Roman Empire, ſo far as it relates to our Lord, as if conscious " that it was not to be refuted. He, no doubt, muſt have perceived its " connection with the charge brought againſt the Apoſtles, and therefore it " deserved his firſt conſideration; for it was natural for the Apoſtles to have " taken their opinions from him; and whilea ſuspicion remained that Chriſt " taught such a doctrine, the attempt to exculpate the Apoſtles from such a " charge muſt inevitably be fruitless."

To the Believer, therefore, as well as to the Infidel, this Controverſy is of the utmoſt importance, as the language upon which the Objections of the Hiſtorian of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire are founded, particularly as it relates to our Lord himſelf, runs throughout the whole of the Goſpel Hiſtory; as it was evidently uttered with a deſign to make a ſtrong impreſſion upon the minds of thoſe to whom it was addreſſed; and as it is utterly impoſſible, otherwiſe, to underſtand, what is the great and leading object which it has in view; for as the learned Univerſity Preacher has, very properly, obſerved, "the Objections of the Hiſtorian of the Decline and Fall of "the Roman Empire are now levelled, not only againſt the "doctrines of particular ſects, but againſt the entire fabric of "Chriſtianity itſelf;—that the conteſt does not lie between "*Paul and Apollos*, or *Apollos and Cephas*; but between "Revelation and Reaſon,—Faith and Infidelity,—the pureſt "Religion in the world, and no religion at all. The eſſential "Intereſts therefore," as this Writer farther obſerves, "of "our Holy Religion—the credit and character of the Clerical "profeſſion, moſt importunately demand ſuch a complete "refutation of our inveterate" (but, in this inſtance, not uncandid) "Enemy, as may defeat his purpoſes, repreſs his "confidence, and ſilence his reproaches." *

If the paſſages upon which this charge is founded, be conſidered in their connection, and with a view to the Goſpel as an Hiſtory, and, more particularly, as an Hiſtory of the claims of Jeſus to *the character of the Meſſiah*, and to the ſituation and circumſtances of things, when Jeſus appeared in the world, this Champion of Infidelity—this formidable Adverſary—this inveterate Enemy, as the learned Univerſity Preacher has termed him †, will be deſpoiled of all his armour in which he boaſted,—the envenomed ſhafts of his ſarcaſtic ridicule, deprived of their poiſon, will fly harmleſs; and Chriſtianity, far from being injured in the conteſt, will gain a degree of luſtre to its truth, which all, who are capable of judging of the nature of evidence, will be forced to acknowledge to be among the ſtrongeſt recommendations of its Celeſtial Origin. Nor will it be among the leaſt advantages attending this examination, that it will preſent to the Chriſtian world a ſpecimen of the only legitimate method of ſtudying the

* See Edwards's Sermon on the Miracles, p. 4. † Ibid. pages 3, 4.

Goſpels,

Goſpels, which can afford a rational ground of hope of aſcertaining, with preciſion, their genuine meaning.

The preſent deplorable ſtate of Scripture Criticiſm, as delineated by Biſhop Newton, in his Diſſertation on the difficulties of Scripture, will demonſtrate the abſolute neceſſity of recurring to *a ſolid foundation*, which, like the polar ſtar to the Mariner, may be a director, in the courſe of a critical and minute enquiry into the true meaning of the Evangeliſts. "The labours of Expoſitors and Commentators," ſays this learned Prelate, "which were deſigned for a remedy, are now "become a part of the diſeaſe. The caſe is the ſame with the "laws of God as with the laws of the land. Read a ſtatute "and you will think you ſufficiently underſtand it, but "afterwards hear the opinions of council upon it, and their "explanations, and they will explain the meaning quite away: "In like manner many a text of Scripture ſeemeth plain enough "to a man upon his reading it by himſelf and comparing it "with the context; but upon conſulting the tribe of "Paraphraſts and Annotators, he ſcarce knoweth what to "think; and inſtead of that one genuin ſenſe which he "conceived, he hath ten or twenty ſenſes offered to him, or "rather, no ſenſe at all. Commentators are a kind of neceſſary "evils, there is no doing well without them or with them. "The truth is, men interpret Scripture according to their "opinions, and frame not their opinions according to ſcripture. "They quote the Scripture, and one would think they "underſtood at leaſt what they quote; but alas, in their "quotations they manifeſtly regard the bare words more "than the meaning, and ſo that there is but ſomething "appoſit in the ſound, no matter how remote it is in the "ſignification." *

The little advantage which has been gained by the labours of Paraphraſts and Commentators—of a Grotius—a Mede—a Whitby—a Locke—and a Macknight,—of Men, in ſhort, whoſe abilities are not to be queſtioned, muſt neceſſarily lead to the concluſion, either that the Scriptures are unintelligible; or that no method has hitherto been adopted of doing them full juſtice. The real fact is, that the natural and the only true method of ſtudying the Scriptures have been moſt deplorably

* See Biſhop Newton's Diſſertation on the Difficulties of Scripture, Vol. VI. pages 220, 221.

neglected. They have been tranſmitted down to us under *the character of Hiſtories*, and the primary deſign of thoſe Hiſtories, beyond all reaſonable doubt, is to prove that Jeſus was *the Meſſiah*. This deſign is manifeſt through every page of the Goſpels, and yet how little attention has been paid to them *as Hiſtories*, and to this one *primary* Object of them, the Objections of the Hiſtorian of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, founded upon the conceſſions of the ableſt Divines, will very fully demonſtrate; for when they are conſidered in this light, they will be found to exhibit internal Characters of truth equal to thoſe of any other Hiſtory, either in ancient or modern times; and, what is more to the purpoſe, they will afford, to the judicious and attentive Reader, criteria ſufficient to determine the preciſe meaning of the language of our Lord, upon the ſubject of *his coming*;—ſufficient to vindicate both his character and that of his Apoſtles, from the very ſuſpicion of fraud or falſehood;—ſufficient, in a word, to prove, to the ſatisfaction of every candid and impartial enquirer, that his prediction was not *figuratively and metaphorically*—but fairly and literally accompliſhed, and that, conſequently, the Objection of the Hiſtorian of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire is founded upon a miſapprehenſion of *the nature of his coming*, as repreſented in thoſe paſſages upon which his Objection is founded.

" To judge of the ſacred Writings," ſays Mr. Richards, " by the habits and ſentiments which now prevail, is the moſt " dangerous error into which the ſtudent in ſacred literature " can fall. The Enemies of Chriſtianity, ſenſible of the " advantages which reſult from ſuch an uncandid trial of them, " have artfully ſpoken of them with a reference to the cuſtoms, " the learning, and the ſpirit of theſe latter times. It may, " with confidence, be maintained, that their indecent ridicule " and authoritative aſſertions will gradually loſe their effect, in " proportion as our attention is directed to the age and ſituation " of things when our Lord appeared. We muſt permit " ourſelves to be carried back into ancient times. We muſt " imagine ourſelves to be placed in the ſituation of (Chriſt and " his Apoſtles). We muſt, as it were, convey ourſelves " among their countrymen,—adopt their manners,—glow with " their ſentiments, and even imbibe their prejudices. That " we may fully enjoy the ſplendid productions of Genius, " with which Greece and Rome were enriched, we

" explore,

" explore, with laborious accuracy, the minuteſt traits of " Character which diſtinguiſh thoſe illuſtrious nations. Let " the moſt important circumſtances relating to *the coming of* " *Chriſt* be examined with equal induſtry and zeal, and the " Champion of Infidelity will ſoon be compelled to relinquiſh " his preſumptuous hopes of triumph." *

The coming of Chriſt, it is evident from the moſt curſory attention to the ſacred Writings, was the ſubject of propheſy, from the earlieſt Ages of the World. " It was," ſays the very able Writer juſt quoted, " the principal end and deſign " of divine Inſpiration to bear teſtimony to the truth of " Chriſtianity. The bleſſed Jeſus and his divine Religion " were the conſtant ſubjects of the predictions of the Prophets. " Secondary circumſtances were incidentally mentioned, but " our holy Redeemer was the favourite theme of all, from " the opening of the Revelation, at the fall of Man, to the " cloſe of Jewiſh prophecy with Malachi. If we ſhould " expunge from the Old Teſtament all the paſſages which " relate to his Advent and Religion; the remaining part would " abound with a profuſion of predictions, which, though " ſingularly ſtriking in themſelves, would be deprived of " their bond of connection, and would not conduce to any " end of general and tranſcendent importance."

Of all the Prophecies with which the Hiſtory of the Old Teſtament abounds, that of Daniel is the moſt remarkable, and is moſt particularly worthy of Notice, upon this ſubject, as it is the foundation of that language which Jeſus, and his illuſtrious Harbinger John the Baptiſt, afterwards adopted. Having aſſerted that Nebuchadnezzar's dream had particular reference to various revolutions which, in the order of divine Providence, were to ariſe in the different ſtates and empires of the world; that kingdoms of great power and extent were to give way to others, and that theſe again ſhould be ſwallowed up in ſubſequent revolutions; the Prophet foretells the riſe of *a new kingdom* which ſhould not, like thoſe which he had before been deſcribing, be ſubject to change or decay;—but that, on the contrary, it ſhould laſt for ever. Dan. ii. 44. *In the days of theſe Kings ſhall the God of Heaven ſet up a Kingdom*

* See Mr. Richards's Bampton Lectures, pages 169, 170. The Reader is requeſted to obſerve a ſlight deviation from Mr. Richards's language, to accommodate it to the deſign of this work.

that

that shall never be destroyed, and the Kingdom shall not be left to other people... It shall break in pieces and consume (in its progreſs) *all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever.* So again Ch. vii. 13, 14, he ſays, *I saw in the night Visions, and behold one like the* or a *Son of Man came with the clouds of Heaven, and came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought him near before him; and there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed.* *

With

* There are many other paſſages which might here very properly be adduced, predicting *the coming of the Messiah*, but there is one which muſt not be omitted, as it will afford an opportunity of presenting the Reader with ſome excellent Obſervations upon it, by Mr. Richards, in his admirable Bamptonian Lectures.

" The great leader of Iſrael, when he had deliverd the law to his " countrymen, and finiſhed the labours which he was especially appointed " to accompliſh, predicted that, in a future age, their God would raiſe up " among their brethren a Prophet like unto himſelf, who would be charged " to communicate his Almighty Will, and would be entitled to their " implicit belief and obedience, on pain of his moſt severe displeaſure. The " Prophecy, according to the application even of an inspired Apoſtle, " referred immediately to *the Messiah*; at whose appearance the Authority of " Moſes was superſeded, the obligation of his law ceased, and all the " inhabitants of the Globe were admitted to an equal participation of divine " favour, with the chosen deſcendants of Abraham. Now let it be ſupposed " that Moſes was unconſcious of the full extent of the prediction, and let us " attend only to the literal ſense of his words which they muſt neceſſarily " have borne, at the moment of their delivery, we ſhall surely be obliged to " confeſs, that though admirably chosen, upon the ſuppoſition of a divine " inspiration, as an effectual preservation againſt the rejection of any future " Meſſenger, or new covenant, in consequence of the prejudices of the " people, yet, conſidered ſolely in an human point of view, they were moſt " unfavourable to the cauſe to which the Prophet had been entirely devoted; " and directly oppoſite to every known dictate of natural policy.

" It has been the great object of all founders of states and empires, to give " ſtability to their inſtitutions, by guarding them againſt the raſhneſs of future " innovators. For this end, they have generally advanced their own authority, " as far as it has been poſſible, above that of their ambitious deſcendants. " When the Spartan Law-giver had completely formed his Republic, he " bound the Citizens, by an oath, to maintain its conſtitution inviolate till " his return. He departed, and never more was ſeen. The pretended " Prophet of Arabia declared himſelf, *the final Messenger* of the Almighty, " and thus endeavoured effectually to ſecure his Religion from the dangerous " pretenſions of ſucceeding Impoſtors. So powerful, in general, is this " ambitious wiſh among Legiſlators, that it has prevailed over the faſcinating " allurements

With an evident view to theſe predictions of the Prophet Daniel, and to the language which he adopted, John the Baptiſt foretold *the near approach of this kingdom. In thoſe days*, ſays the Evangelical Hiſtorian, *came John the Baptiſt, preaching in the wilderneſs of Judea, ſaying, Repent, for*

" allurements of dominion, and ſometimes even over the love of Life. " Lycurgus, as I have juſt obſerved, retired to voluntary baniſhment and " ſolitude; and, in conformity with the ſame principle, the celebrated " founder of the Northern kingdoms is repreſented, in their fabulous " Hiſtories, as having plunged the ſword into his own breaſt.

" From this general principle, the prediction of Moſes can alone, perhaps, " be excepted. The great object of his exertions had been attained. He had " conducted the Iſraelites to the borders of the promiſed land. From the " Mountains of Piſgah, he had ſhewn them the fruitful vales of Paleſtine, in " which they were to repoſe after their long and painful wanderings. He " was venerated by his countrymen, as their Deliverer from ſervitude,—as " the Founder of their Kingdom,—and as the Meſſenger of their God. His " character had been ſanctioned by the moſt awful manifeſtations of " Omnipotent Power; and his laws had been ſolemnly received as the Will of " Heaven. The moment of his death approached, and he was about to " bequeath his eſtabliſhment, as a ſacred depoſit, to the care of future " generations. Yet, far from hallowing that eſtabliſhment, by imputing an " unrivalled ſanctity to his own character, or commending himſelf to " poſterity, as the ſole favourite of the Almighty, he predicted the coming " of a Prophet whoſe authority ſhould reſemble his own. Far from " pronouncing a curſe upon thoſe who ſhould tranſfer their obedience to " another, he even foreſhewed to them *a future chief*, whoſe mandates they " would be bound to obey. In conſequence of this prediction, his own " preeminence was diminiſhed, by the expectation of the future Prophet, " and an opportunity was offered to Impoſtors, who might hereafter found " their impious pretenſions, even upon the perverted authority of his own " prophetic evidence. In every other inſtance he had carefully provided for " the ſecurity of the laws which he had delivered, and had branded with " the infamy of impoſture all thoſe who ſhould preſume to violate that " ſacred frame of civil and religious polity which, with ſuch viſible and " awful proofs of divine approbation, he had firmly conſtituted among his " countrymen.

" In this prediction alone, his conduct was in direct oppoſition, as well " to his own general principles of action, as to the uniform tenor of example. " I am aware that this prediction has been conſidered by ſome Interpreters as " expreſſive of the ſucceſſion of Prophets in Iſrael. But though it may be " ſatisfactorily proved that ſuch a meaning was, at leaſt, neither the ſole nor " the primary one intended by Moſes; yet even to thoſe who adopt ſuch a " confined interpretation, the argument which has been urged will be ſcarcely " leſs forcible. Under ſuch circumſtances, it would have been the policy of " a deceiver to repreſent the ſucceeding Prophets as ſubſervient to himſelf, " and as inferior agents employed in ſupport of his inſtitution. He would " neither have admitted them to a complete equality, nor denounced " tremendous threats againſt thoſe who ſhould not implicitly hearken to their " voice. See Richards's Sermons, pages 172—177.

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THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS AT HAND. And when Jeſus entered upon his important Office, it is particularly worthy of remark, that he used preciſely the ſame language. Matt. iv. 17. *From that time* i. e. from the time that John the Baptiſt was thrown into priſon, *Jesus began to preach and to say, Repent, for* THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS AT HAND. When, afterwards, he commiſſioned his Apoſtles and the ſeventy Diſciples, to preach in his name, his inſtructions to them were, ſtrictly to adhere to this declaration of *its near approach.* Luke x. 9. *Say to them.* i. e. to the Jews, *The Kingdom of God is come nigh unto you.* Their public inſtructions are likewiſe ſtiled *preaching the Kingdom of God.* Thus Mark i. 14. Jeſus is ſaid to go into Galilee *preaching the Kingdom of God.* And, in another paſſage, it is ſaid, Matt. ix. 35. that *Jesus went about all the Cities and Villages teaching the Gospel,* or, as the word properly ſignifies and ought to have been expreſſed, *the good news of the Kingdom,* i. e. of *the Kingdom of Heaven,* which he had, at firſt, announced, *and healing every sickness and every disease among the people.* So again Luke viii. 1. *And Jesus went throughout every City and Village, preaching and shewing the glad tidings of* THE KINGDOM OF GOD.

As this was our Lord's *original language,* ſo he continued to adhere to it, with the moſt ſcrupulous exactneſs, till the very cloſe of his Life; but whether he uſed it preciſely in the ſame ſenſe, can be diſcovered *only* by a cloſe and attentive examination of it, in its connection. But whatever doubt there may be as to the meaning of theſe latter paſſages, there cannot poſſibly be any of *his original language*; for the Evangelical Hiſtorians, having thus introduced Jeſus and his forerunner as declaring *the near approach of the Kingdom of Heaven,* drawn from the prophecy of Daniel, as the foundation of their ſubſequent Hiſtories, have not failed to point out, in very ſtrong terms, the effects which it had upon their countrymen. When John the Baptiſt made uſe of it, St. Matthew ſays, Ch. iii. 5. *Jerusalem and all Judea, and all the region round about Jordan, went out to meet him, and were baptized by him in Jordan, confessing their sins.* In like manner, it is ſaid, Ch. iv. 23, 25, that *when Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the gospel,* or good news, *of the Kingdom, there followed him great multitudes of people from Galilee, from Decapolis, from Jerusalem, from Judea, and from beyond Jordan.* And the cauſe

cause of their flocking to him, in such multitudes, is thus explained by St. Luke; for he says, Ch. iii. 15, that *as the people were in expectation* of the appearance of the Messiah, *all men mused in their hearts whether he*, viz. John the Baptist, was ὁ Χριστος, *the Christ*, or the Messiah, or not.

Dr. Sykes, upon this subject, has well observed, "that "the Jews were so well acquainted with this language, and "were so well apprized of a kingdom which God had resolved "to set up, that as often as Jesus talked of *the kingdom of* "*Heaven*, or *of God*, neither the people, nor their Rulers, "ever offered to ask him the meaning of that phrase, which "yet we cannot suppose them not to have done, if he had talked "with and to them, in a language they were unacquainted "with." *

Bishop Chandler says, "The expectation of the Messiah, "intimated in the use of this language, was not the opinion "of a few devout people only, who are said to wait for *the* "*consolation of Israel*, at the time of our Saviour's birth, or of "the meaner sort, who thought *the kingdom of God* (a phrase "for the kingdom of the Messiah) should immediately appear; "but it was the settled judgment of the chief Priests, the "Scribes, and the learned in their Law. They who made the "study of the Scriptures their chief business, were unanimous "in this belief; the expectation was National." †

The learned Bamptonian Lecturer, Dr. White, says, "It is "evident from several passages in the New Testament, that "the Jews were in expectation of *the Messiah*, at the time "of Christ's appearance. The Woman of Samaria, though "of a Schismatical church, yet deriving her knowledge from "the same sources of divine prophecy, said to Jesus,—*I know* "*that Messiah cometh*, &c. John iv, 25. In Luke iii. 5. "we are informed, that the preaching of John was of so divine "a nature that *all men mused in their hearts whether he was* "*the Christ or not*. The message of the Jews, by the Priests "and Levites, to John, *Art thou the Christ?* is a sufficient "proof of the expectation which generally prevailed, of the "advent of a divine person, sustaining this character. John i. 9. "*The coming of the Messiah* made an express article of the "Jewish faith, as we are informed by Maimonides, and others

* See Dr. Sykes on the Christian Religion, Chap. III. p. 29.
† See Bishop Chandler's Defence of Christianity, Vol. I. p. 5,

" of that church ; and the denial of it was deemed a dangerous " heresy, and a virtual renunciation of the authority and " truth of the Law of Moses." *

Mr. Richards likewise, in his incomparable Bamptonian Lectures, observes, that " the Advent of the Messiah was the " Æra to which the Jews looked forward with pride and " joyful expectation. All their national institutions seemed " to them to be formed with a view to the appearance of this " exalted personage. This expectation was their pride in " prosperity, and their consolation in defeat ; and, at one " period of their history, it preserved their national spirit, " and, perhaps, their very existence, as a people, during the " desolation of their native territory, and the ignominious " captivity of its inhabitants." †

Nor is the evidence that this was the general opinion of the Jews, at the time of our Saviour's appearance, confined to the Christian Scriptures, or to Christian Writers only. The celebrated Josephus, who was himself *a Jew*, and a distinguished General, in the early part of the Jewish war, which terminated in the destruction of their country, bears ample testimony to the truth of this important fact. " That," says he, " which chiefly excited the Jews to the war, was " an ambiguous ‡ Prophecy which was also found in their " sacred books, that, at that time, some one, within their " country, should arise that should obtain the empire of

* See White's Bampton Lectures, pages 28, 29, in the Notes.

† See Richards's Bampton Lectures, pages 191, 192.

‡ " Though Josephus," says Bishop Chandler, " calls this prophecy *an* " *ambiguous or dark oracle*, because the event did not answer to his sense of it, " yet he owns it was so understood in the sense I am speaking of, by their " *Wise Men*, and by those before them that had *delivered* down this sense of it. " Very dark indeed it must be, if describing one of the royal house of David " to be their King, it intended a *Roman* of an obscure family: if describing " him, as the converter of the Gentiles to the knowledge of the true God, it was " to be understood of one that lived and died an idolater: if describing him " as the person that should put an end to the Roman Empire, in belief, " whenever the Jews took up arms against them, it meaned a Roman should " destroy the Jewish nation and religion. Josephus therefore, whatever " motives he had for so applying the prophecy, upon second thoughts in " writing his Antiquities, returned to his first belief, and fairly hints there, " as do the rest of his nation, that Daniel's Messiah was yet to come and " subdue the *Romans*." See Bishop Chandler's Defence of Christianity, Vol. I. pages 29, 30.

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" the world." Tacitus likewise, the Roman Annalist, mentions the same persuasion as having existed at that period, and particularly, " that it was found in the antient " books of the Priests." He adds, that " this prediction had " taken such full possession of the common people, among " the Jews, that they were not compelled to resign their " dependance on this Prophecy, but by a series of calamities." And, most remarkable to the same purpose, are the words of Suetonius. " It was," says he, " an antient and uninterrupted " opinion throughout the East, that it was foretold in the " Prophecies that, at that time, the people of Judea should " be Lords of all."

The testimony of Writers of such respectability in the antient and modern world, cannot but be deemed of considerable importance in establishing *the fact*, that there was *a general expectation of a great Personage*, who should appear about the time of our Saviour's coming into the world, as a most distinguished and extraordinary character. And that this testimony should be confirmed, by a writer who denies that there is any evidence worth notice, of the very existence of Jesus Christ, is not a little remarkable. But such is the fact. Mr. Volney himself, the noted Author of a work entitled, *Ruins*,—the daring and intrepid Mr. Volney, is compelled, by the force of truth, to own the general expectation of a deliverer to come. " From the time," says he, " that the " Assyrians had destroyed the kingdom of Samaria, some " sagacious Spirits foresaw, announced, and predicted the " same fate to Jerusalem; and all their predictions were " stamped by this particularity, that they always concluded " with prayers for a happy re-establishment and regeneration, " which were, in like manner spoken of in the the way of " Prophecies. The enthusiasm of the Hierophants had figured " a Royal Deliverer, who was to re-establish the nation in " its antient glory. The Hebrews were again to become a " powerful and conquering people, and Jerusalem the capital of " an Empire that was to extend over the whole world. Events " having realized the first part of those predictions, the ruin " of Jerusalem; the people clung to the second, with a " firmness of belief proportioned to their misfortunes; and the " afflicted Jews waited with the impatience of want and desire, " for that Victorious King and Deliverer that was to come,

" in order to save the nation of Moses and restore the throne " to David." *

This general expectation of the Jews, so manifestly pointed out, by the effects which John's announcing the approach of *the Kingdom of Heaven* had upon them, and so fully confirmed, by the testimony of Jewish, Christian, and even Infidel Writers;

* See Volney's Ruins, 3d edit. English Translation, pages 285, 286.

The infidelity of the French Philosophers, as they are fond of calling themselves, is truly wonderful; for to disbelieve the existence of Jesus Christ is to render Historical evidence useless; for as has been very justly observed, there is not an hundredth part of the evidence for the existence of Julius Cæsar, that there is for that of Jesus Christ; and the man who has the hardiness to deny such evidence, is not fit to be reasoned with.

The Author of the Pursuits of Literature, speaking of Volney's Ruins, says, " it is written with some spirit, and not without eloquence in some " parts, and abounds with what is now called Philosophy. The intent of " this book is to attack every principle of religion in the heart; even the " principles of the religion now termed natural. Mr. Volney wishes to " convince mankind that *every* pretence to revelation, in every age and in every " country, is equally false and equally unfounded, and by a jargon of " language, and antiquity, and mythology, and philosophy, he labours to " confound and blend *them all* in uncertain tradition and astronomical " allusions. The real ignorance of this man on the subject of true Religion, " is as conspicuous as the puny literature which appears to support his strange " doctrines and foolish opinions. Upon the subject of what he calls the " filiations of Religions, (for the French must have their new jargon of words " in every subject) he says, ' We acknowledge in one word, that all the " Theological Doctrines on the origin of the world, on the nature of God, " on the Revelation of his Laws, and the appearance of his person, are nothing " more than recitals of astronomical facts, and figurative emblematical stories " of the play of the Constellations, (du Jeu des Constellations p. 167.') " The chapter on the subject of Christianity is the strangest of all; for he " declares that Christianity consists in the allegorical worship of the Sun, " in the cabalistical names of Christ, Yesus, or Jesus. And this is a " formidable opponent! This is one of the guides to whom we are to give " up our prejudices! Read any one of the four Evangelists, and give your " own answer! The impudence of Mr. Volney is at least equal to any other " power he possesses; for he requires of his Reader only the surrender of " his common sense, and the common principles of any knowledge; yet " he demands the admission of all his allegories and mystical meanings; of " which, in the true French style, no doubt is to be entertained, and then " the world is to be emancipated and delivered! From what? From " credulity and superstition! Q. E. D. Upon this, Mr. Volney observes, " the Priests murmur. I think the Laity will at least do as much, at the " words of this Apostle of nonsense, blasphemy, folly, and the rights of " men; which the French never fail to introduce, when they have laid them " all prostrate, civil, moral, and mental. This is but a specimen of such " writers whom we are to obey as the deliverers of mankind from " superstition, and the directors of our minds in the way of truth. " *Professing themselves wise, they are become fools.*"

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Writers, pretty plainly shews that when Jesus appeared, this great personage was anxiously expected by them, and that the time fixed, by the Antient Prophets, for his appearance, was about to expire. Mr. Kett, in his History, the Interpreter of Prophecy, has made an observation upon this subject, which appears to be extremely well worthy of the Reader's notice. "It is," says he, "a very striking fact in proof of the "general belief of the Jewish nation, respecting the time of the "Messiah's appearance, that from the death of Herod the "Great, when Judas of Galilee and Simon first assumed the "title of Kings and Deliverers of the Jews, to the destruction "of the Temple, the Jewish History is filled with the names "of false Christs and false Prophets who deceived both the "Jews and the Samaritans. None appeared *before* this period, "and not more than one for five or six centuries after it." *

With this general expectation of the appearance of a person, under *the character of the Messiah*, at the time when Jesus announced that *the Kingdom of Heaven was at hand*, so fully admitted by the Jew, the Christian, and the Infidel; it might naturally have been expected, that *the whole Jewish Nation* would have become his willing subjects, and that nothing could

The late Sir W. Jones, whose attainments have deservedly placed him in the highest rank of intellectual eminence, after possessing himself of all that the Sages and Philosophers of all times have said and thought upon the works of nature, left the following note at the end of his Bible. "I have regularly "and attentively read these *Holy Scriptures*, and am of opinion that this "Volume, independently of its divine origin, contains more true sublimity, "more exquisite beauty, more pure morality, more important history, and "finer strains both of Poetry and Eloquence, than can be collected from "all other books, in whatever age or language they may have been composed. "The two parts of which the Scriptures consist, are connected by a chain of "compositions, which bear no resemblance in form or style, to any that "can be produced from the stores of *Grecian*, *Persian*, or even *Arabian* "learning: the antiquity of these compositions no man doubts; and the "*unstrained application* of them to events *long subsequent* to their *publication*, "is a solid ground of belief that they are *genuine productions* and consequently "*inspired*."

The character of Sir W. Jones will bear examination, whether it is considered in a moral and literary view, and it may confidently be affirmed, it will lose nothing in comparison with that of Mr. Volney.

* See Kett's History, the Interpreter of Prophecy, 3d. Edit. Vol. I. p. 168. See also Bp. Chandler to the same purpose and nearly in the same words, where the judicious Reader will find many other things, highly worthy of his attention, upon the subject of *the general expectation* of the Jews concerning *the coming of the Messiah*, Vol. I. pages 146, 147.

possibly

possibly have been more favourable to his reception, under that character, than such an expectation. The fact, however is, as ingenuously acknowledged by the Evangelical Historians themselves, that very few, comparatively speaking, owned Jesus to be *the Messiah.—He came to his own and his own received him not.* And the whole of their History, as exhibited in the Gospels, shews that, *as a Nation*, the Jews instead of receiving him as *the Messiah*, considered him as *an Impostor*, in assuming that Character, and, as such, they put him to an ignominious and cruel death. And, even of those who did adhere to him, from a belief that he was *the Messiah* whom they so earnestly expected; it is, upon various occasions related, that they expressed the utmost anxiety to have those proofs of *his Messiahship* exhibited, which they had affixed to that Character, and *that*, even after *his resurrection from the dead.*

The principal cause of the Unbelief of the Jews appears to have been, their considering their Messiah as *a temporal Prince*, who was to conduct them to conquest and to empire. This important fact is so fully and so ably described by Dr. White, in his learned and eloquent Bamptonian Lectures, that no apology will be deemed necessary, for presenting it to the Reader, in his own words. " In the person of the " Messiah," says he, " they beheld a mighty and glorious " King who should appear with all the pomp of temporal " greatness and all the terrors of earthly power, trampling " upon the Enemies and Oppressors of Israel, and leading forth " his people, amidst the triumphs of conquest and splendor " of dominion. The manifest expiration of the time prescribed " by the Prophets *, the departure of the Sceptre from Judah, " and

* Bp. Chandler has observed, " that it is still extant in the Talmud, as " the tradition of former times. *In Daniel is delivered to us, the end of the " Messias*, i. e. the *term* wherein he ought to come, as *Jarchi* explains it. " And another *Jew* of high Antiquity, *R. Berachia*, observed, that the end " or period of the future Redemption, was revealed to two men, Jacob " and Daniel. But higher than both is the age of *R. Nehemias*, for he lived " fifty years before Jesus Christ, yet then he declared, as he is cited by " *Grotius*, that the time fixed by *Daniel*, for the Messias could not go " beyond those fifty years."

Nor ought we to pass over the testimony of *Josephus*, because in that, we have the testimony of the whole Nation. Thus he writes, " Daniel did not " only foretel future things, which was common to him, with other Prophets, " but

" and the subjection of their country to the Roman power,
" were circumstances which at this time added new weight to
" the opinion which had thus been endeared by early prejudice
" and sanctified by authoritative tradition. Every heart was
" now warmed with hope, and every eye looked forward with
" anxious expectation to the moment when the glory of Zion
" should appear, and Judea be for ever exalted above the
" kingdoms of the Earth; when they should behold suppliant
" nations crouding into the sanctuary, and Rome herself, the
" haughty mistress of the world, bowing prostrate at the feet
" of Jerusalem.

" but also *set a time for their coming to pass*. He did not only foretel
" the calamity that befel our Nation from *Antiochus* many years before it
" happened; but he also wrote, of *the Dominion of the Romans*, and of *the*
" *great desolation they should hereafter bring upon our People*. These things,
" revealed by God, he delivered in writing, to be read by posterity, that
" they might by comparing the event with the prediction, admire the
" high honour (intimacy) the Prophet was admitted to by God, and also
" be able to refute the Epicurean error (he might have added, and that of
" the blind Fatalists) that would exclude God out of the government of
" human affairs—for how is it possible, the event should correspond with
" the prediction, if things below were moderated by chance and not a wise
" prescience." No where else, but in this prophecy of LXX Weeks doth *Daniel* speak of the devastation the *Jews* were to suffer from the Romans; no where else is a *term* fixed for these events; we may therefore be assured that *Josephus* referred to this very prophesy, for what he writes; and that Jesus Christ had the Authority of *the Jews* with him, when he interpreted the same prophecy of the destruction of the Temple by the *Romans*.

" I foresee it will be asked, why *Josephus* saith nothing here," adds the learned Bishop, " of the Messias, as well as of the *Romans*? To which this is
" the answer. He believed this success of the *Romans* against the *Jews*,
" did infer that *the Messias was come*. For he, as well as others of his
" countrymen, were led from the progress of the *Roman* arms, to relinquish
" the national notion of the Messias, and bestow that tittle on *Vespasian*.
" The text said, from the going forth of the decree, to Messia the *Prince*,
" shall be sixty-nine weeks—and again, *the Prince's future people*, or as it may
" be rendered, *the people of the Prince that shall be*, or *shall come*, shall destroy
" the City and the Sanctuary. From hence, baulked in their hope of *a*
" *temporal deliverer* among their own people, they imagined, on the other
" extreme, that he must become *the Emperor of the World*, that should
" subdue their Nation, and that it was enough, to answer the prophecy
" that he was saluted Emperor in their land. Grounding his opinion, on
" this interpretation, *Josephus* told *Vespasian*, while he was General only,
" at the begining of the War, that he would be Emperor; and *Jerusalem*
" being destroyed, he professes, that the Oracle which foretold one of their
" country should have the Empire, was fulfilled in the creation of *Vespasian*
" to be Emperor in Judea." With respect to the calculation of Daniel's LXX Weeks, See this valuable Writer, Vol. I. pages, 141—4.

" Nor

" Nor were these glorious expectations confined to the " chief rulers of the Jews, whose superior stations seeming to " entitle them to the first honours and emoluments of the " Messiah's Kingdom, might have induced them the more readily " to embrace, and the more industriously to disseminate, an " opinion which promised so complete a gratification to their " ambition. Even the Disciples of our Lord who had been, " in general, selected from the lowest and the meanest of the " people, long retained the same delusive opinion, and indulged " the same fallacious hopes with the rest of their countrymen.

" Nay, so firmly was this belief impressed on their " minds, that not all the frequent and solemn declarations of " their master to the contrary, were able to efface it entirely. " Nor indeed do they seem to have been effectually roused " from the pleasing dream of temporal grandeur which had " captivated their imaginations, till his death had tried the " constancy of their faith, till his resurrection had revived " their drooping spirits, and his ascension into heaven had " rectified their errors and invigorated their resolution.

" From this mistaken opinion arose the frequent struggles " for superiority among them, which they have so ingenuously " recorded. Hence the petition of the Mother of Zebedee's " Children. Hence too, the impatient and misguided zeal of " Peter, who when Christ pathetically related his approaching " humiliation, his sufferings, and his death, took him and " began to rebuke him, saying, *Be it far from thee Lord,* " *this shall not be unto thee.*

" To this may be added the words of one of the Disciples, with " whom our Lord, in his way to Emmaus, conversed after his " resurrection. *We trusted that it had been he who should have* " *redeemed Israel.* This reflection arose from the same prejudice " that had long flattered the national vanity, and expressed the " most painful sense of disappointment." *

" The expectation of *the coming of the Messiah*, about the " time of the appearance of Jesus," says the judicious Lardner, " was universal, and had been so for some while. But with the " idea of a Prophet, or extraordinary Teacher of Religion, " they had joined also that of a worldly king and conqueror, " who should deliver the Jewish people from the burdens " under which they laboured, raise them to a state of " independence; and bring the nations of the Earth into

* See White's Bampton Lectures.

" subjection

" subjection to them, to be ruled and tyrannized over by them. " And because our Lord did not perform, nor attempt this, " they rejected and crucified him. If he would but have " assumed the state and character of an earthly Prince; Scribes " and Pharisees, Priests and People, would all have joined " themselves to him, and have put themselves under his " banner. Of this we see many proofs in the Gospels. This " disposition prevailed to the last." *

These observations of these learned and ingenious writers, it must be observed, do not relate to matters of doubtful speculation, about which different opinions have been entertained. They are fully admitted, by Christians of all denominations, *as facts*, which are indisputable. They are *facts*, which are believed by all who believe that there was such a person as Jesus Christ, or, who think there is any degree of credit due to the History of the New Testament. Nay more, they are facts which, as has been observed, the testimonies of Josephus, Tacitus, Suetonius, and even the Atheistical Volney, fully corroborate. And, what is particularly worthy of the Reader's notice, they are *facts* which have for their vouchers, *all Modern Jews*; for they entertain, precisely, the same sentiments, and, as Christians term them, *the same prejudices*, concerning *the Nature of the Messiah's Character*, with their remote ancestors, and consequently they are *living witnesses* that *these facts* are built upon such a solid foundation of *genuine historical evidence*, as to leave no room for doubt, upon the mind of the intelligent and impartial enquirer.

From these premises; it will naturally and necessarily follow, that if the Gospel History be genuine; it must be an History of the Controversy between Jesus and the Jews; not only whether Jesus himself was *the Messiah* but what was the true nature of the Messiah's Character; the one supposing that he would be a temporal Prince to raise them to Universal Empire; the other declaring that his Kingdom was not of this world, but was wholly of a Spiritual Nature.

Such being the acknowledged sentiments and prejudices of the whole Jewish nation, in general, and of the Disciples of Jesus, in particular, concerning *the nature of that Kingdom*

* See Dr. Lardner's Ancient Jewish and Heathen Testimonies, Vol. I. p. 69.

which he had announced to be *at hand*; it must be evident that *the primary object* of Jesus, in the exercise of the duties of his office, must have been to give, both to the one and the other such proofs of his being *the Messiah*, as the real nature of that Character would admit of; such as were sufficient to satisfy an impartial enquirer; such, in a word, as would have a tendency, gradually to correct their prejudices, without too severely wounding their feelings! And, what mode of conduct was it proper for him, as a wise man, to pursue, in order to ensure these important purposes? The extreme delicacy of the situation of Jesus, and the difficulties which he had to encounter in consequence of those prejudices, in unfolding to them *the true nature of his Character*, must, from his very entrance upon his public Ministry, be sufficiently evident. Every one must immediately perceive, from a due consideration of *the nature of the expectations of the Jews*, at the time of his appearance, the absolute necessity which Jesus was under, of acting with the utmost prudence and circumspection; of his being very sparing of his declarations, on the one hand, that he was himself *the Messiah*; least the too great eagerness of the people should frustrate the important purposes which he had in view; and on the other, least, while he checked their ardor, he should totally destroy their hopes of his being *the Messiah*, by not giving them the necessary assurances of *his coming* in that Character, and thereby induce them to forsake him.

If this was the mode of conduct which it was natural for Jesus to pursue, and, if it was the only one which it was possible for him, in such circumstances, to pursue with success, it will follow, as a necessary consequence, that it is the only view in which the Gospel History can possibly be studied, to the fullest advantage. The New Testament has sometimes been termed *a sealed book*, and the numerous and unsuccessful controversies concerning its *genuine meaning*, has but too much justified the use of this epithet; but, if *the Gospel History* be examined, in the manner here proposed, as *an History* of the proofs which Jesus exhibited of his being *the Messiah*, and of the manner of his producing those proofs, the judicious and attentive Reader will not only be furnished with an important fund of entertainment and instruction, which no other method of studying the

New

New Testament can possibly afford him; but he will have *a sure clue* to the right understanding of it, particularly upon the subject of the objections of the Historian of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, respecting *the coming of Christ*, which cannot fail to produce the highest and most heartfelt satisfaction, to all who are competent judges of the nature of evidence.

If the Gospel History be examined, with a close and impartial attention to the circumstances, which in the preceding pages have at large been described; the judicious and attentive Reader cannot fail to observe, the most unequivocal and decisive proofs of our Lord's having conducted himself in such a manner, as to consult, with an unexampled tenderness and humanity, the prejudices of his countrymen, and at the same time to check the eagerness which naturally arose from the extreme ardor of their expectations of *the coming of the Messiah* as a temporal Prince! Far from being forward in declaring himself to be the *Messiah*, even to his most intimate friends and associates; it was highly to the credit of his Character, and an unequivocal proof of his consummate wisdom and prudence, that, in general, he left this to be inferred, from the excellence of the doctrines which he taught, from the many wonderful works which he performed, and from the perfect purity and integrity of his moral and religious conduct. Occasionally, however, and as circumstances and events more particularly required, he gave them the most direct and unequivocal assurances of *the coming of the Messiah*, which answered the purpose of keeping up their expectations of *his coming* in that Character, and of insuring their attachment to him, until, by the full disclosure of the important, and particularly interesting events which were to take place during his abode upon earth, they should be led to perceive, how much they had mistaken *the nature of his Character*. And it is particularly worthy of remark, that even when Jesus did think it necessary to make these assurances of *the coming of the Messiah*, it was in a language the most cautious and guarded that can well be imagined. For example, he did not say, *Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel* before I shall declare MYSELF to be *the Messiah*; but *ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel till* THE SON OF MAN, the Messiah *be come*. He did not say, *there be some standing here who shall not taste of death till they see*

ME *coming in* MY *Kingdom*; but *till they see the Son of Man coming in* HIS *Kingdom*.

This cautious mode of proceeding, though it, perhaps, disappointed the schemes of the adversaries of our Lord, and prevented their laying hold of his words to his prejudice; though it probably did not answer *the sanguine expectations* even of his own disciples; though it sometimes threw them into the greatest perplexity, when they compared what he had said to them, with their own preconceived opinions, concerning *the nature of the Messiah's Character and Kingdom*; though, in a word, it did not fully satisfy them of what they most wanted to be informed; yet it was evidently *the only method* which prudence dictated, or, which the peculiar circumstances in which he was placed permitted him to adopt, whether it respected *friends* or *enemies*; for *he well knew what was in Man*, and was thoroughly aware that *the latter*, when they found that he did not answer their ideas of *the Character of the Messiah*, would gladly have laid hold of any favourable opportunity of destroying him, and that the prejudices of *the former* were not to be removed, but by the most gradual and gentle means. It was evidently upon this account, that he appears to have consulted those prejudices, and with so much tenderness and humanity to have sympathized with their weakness; well knowing that in the course of his Ministry, he should have information to give them, which was very different from that which they had been led to expect, and events to unfold, which were totally incompatible with all their ideas of *the nature of the Messiah's Character*.

It is not the object of these remarks to amuse the Reader with *a fanciful theory*; or, to present him with a *romantic*, but ill founded view of *the Gospel History*: for the following examination of the Gospels themselves, will afford unquestionable proofs of our Lord's having conducted himself in the manner here described; of which every one who is disposed to give attention to it, will be capable of forming an accurate and decisive judgment.

The first notice which St. Matthew appears to have given of our Lord's having entered upon the arduous and important work of correcting the prejudices of his countrymen, with respect to *the nature of the Messiah's Character*, is in his celebrated Sermon upon the Mount. And as it has already been observed that those prejudices were common to *the whole*

Jewish

Jewish Nation; the Disciples of Jesus themselves not excepted; it is natural to expect that it would have been addressed to *the multitude in general*, and not *exclusively*, as some have supposed, to *the Apostles*. The Evangelical Historian has been very particular in stating this to have been *the fact*; for at the close of the chapter, immediately preceding this Sermon, after having observed that *Jesus went about Galilee preaching* THE GOSPEL OF good news OF THE KINGDOM, i. e. of *the Kingdom of the Messiah*; he says, Chap. iv. 25. *there followed him great multitudes of people from Galilee, from Decapolis, from Jerusalem, from Judea, and from beyond Jordan*. And in the beginning of the vth Chapter, the Historian says, *that seeing the multitudes* which flocked to him from these different places, *he went up upon a mountain* and addressed this Sermon to them. It is true, indeed, the Historian adds, that *when Jesus was seated*, HIS DISCIPLES *came to him*; but not to lay any great stress upon the observation, that the term *Disciples* is often, in the New Testament, used in a very enlarged sense; this only proves, what will not be controverted, that the Disciples made *a part* of his audience. But this matter appears to be put out of all reasonable doubt, by the Historian's remark at the close of the Sermon; for he there says, that *when Jesus had ended these sayings* the people *were astonished at his doctrine*; and that it might clearly be understood, who were meant by *the people*, the Historian adds, that *when Jesus was come down from the mountain* GREAT MULTITUDES *followed him*.

It being clear from this representation of the Evangelist, that the Sermon upon the Mount was addressed to *the people* at large, and not *exclusively* to the Disciples; it will, upon examination appear, that there is the strongest *internal evidence* that the first object of our Lord, in this Sermon, was to correct the erroneous opinions of his hearers, concerning *the true nature of the Messiah's Kingdom*. This will be evident from the following short paraphrase of the Beatitudes; which though, perhaps, not absolutely necessary to the principle design of this work, will not be thought wholly unconnected with it, or unworthy of the judicious Reader's attention, and more particularly as it will lead to the consideration of a few verses, which immediately succeed them; the beauty, propriety, force, and true meaning of which, seem not hitherto to have been sufficiently attended to.

The

merciful as your Father also is merciful; that is, let your mercy be as extensive, in its principle, and, as far as possible, in its effects, as that of the Great Parent of the Universe; which is not, as that of the Jews was, confined to this, or the other nation; but folds within its embraces, the whole human race, and *is kind even to the unthankful and the evil*. By thus imitating the benevolence, and, as far as was possible, the beneficence of their Heavenly Father, they would have just ground of confidence, of obtaining that mercy from him, which, as *men*, and particular as *sinful men*, they stood in need of, and which was so essential to human happiness. *

The Jews, as appears from various parts of the Gospel History, were extremely nice and punctilious in their external conduct, and lost no occasion of displaying the superior sanctity of their characters, by *praying in the corners of their streets*, by *giving alms* in the most public and ostentatious manner, and by *making broad their Phylacteries*; while, at the same time, *they devoured Widow's Houses*; *omitted the weightier matters of the Law*, and were, in reality, *full of hypocrisy and iniquity*. With a particular view to this part of their character, our Lord appears to have pronounced this Beatitude—*Blessed are the pure in heart*. No outward actions, however specious and plausible to men, who can judge from *the appearance only*, are truly valuable in the sight of God, unless they proceed from purity of intention,

* That a charitable and humane disposition towards other nations, or parties who differed from the Jews was intended to be pointed out, in this Beatitude, seems extremely probable, from the high pitch to which they carried their national partiality. St. Peter candidly confesses that he, in common with the rest of his countrymen, considered it as even, *unlawful to keep company with, or to go to one of another nation*; believing that they were, *exclusively*, the favourites of heaven. The unfriendly influence which this principle must necessarily have had, in contracting the humane and benevolent affections must be obvious to every one, and therefore is, with the greatest propriety, made an important part of the instructions of one, the basis of whose religion was, that God was *the common Parent* of all Mankind. If there is any one virtue of the human heart, which is more peculiarly calculated to produce happiness to Mankind than another, it is the exertion of the humane and tender affections toward others; and, when they are exerted upon that never to be forgotten principle, that *all men the children of one common Father*, then they must do the highest honor to our nature, and be most pleasing and acceptable to Him, who is most assuredly concerned for the general welfare of his creatures, and who cannot be affected with the petty distinctions, upon which many are too apt to value themselves.

and

and an upright heart. And there seems to have been, a peculiar propriety, in the change of the form of the expression, in announcing the reward annexed to this Beatitude. *They shall see God;* this trait of human character being known to God *only*; the reward could only be bestowed, in a future world; *seeing God*, plainly denoting the enjoyment of him.

The sentiments of the Jews concerning *the nature of the Messiah's kingdom*, naturally led them to cherish dispositions unfriendly to peace; but to check, and, if possible, to root out propensities so extremely inimical to human happiness and, even to the quiet and security of mankind,* Jesus says,

* It is much to be feared that most of the Wars which have been engaged in, by Nations stiling themselves Christians, have been in direct opposition to the spirit which is here, in the closest manner connected with the happiness of those who cultivate it. And, for a strong proof that the opposite spirit is productive of the greatest unhappiness to the human race, the reader is referred to the calamities which have arisen in consequence of the Wars which have taken place within the last fifty years; so that if *blessed are the Peace Makers;* the converse of the proposition is equally true; *cursed are the Peace Breakers.*

The witty Satyrist to ridicule the established usage of fasting in times of War, says,

> "So far am I a Quaker I must own,
> "And dare not thus address th' eternal Throne;
> "Heav'n is most merciful, inclin'd to spare,
> "And scorns to kill our Neighbours for a prayer.
> "Fasts will not whet French Powder; nor will words
> "Of pious imprecation, blunt French Swords.——Entitled, 1796.

If the unjust aggressor expects by his prayers to conciliate Heaven to favor his unrighteous cause, he must think the Deity altogether such an one as himself. If even the prayers of the injured party were *pious imprecations* for the distruction of his enemies, no doubt both religion and humanity would forbid the practice. But to the honor of Christianity be it said, in no instance does it shine with more distinguished splendor, than in the benevolence and philanthropy which it breathes. If therefore a single sentiment encouraging the exercise of the malevolent passions is contained in the public devotions upon such occasions, it can have no sanction from the Author of Christianity; but like *the dead fly in the Apothecary's ointment*, must mar the whole composition.

Much indeed is it to be wished, that all men, as well as the Satyrist, were in this respect, *Quakers;* that they would *turn their Swords into Plow-shares, and their Spears into Pruning-hooks, and that they would learn War no more;* but while there are men who are *not Quakers*, who seek *to destroy* instead of *saving Mens' lives;* they must, by the great law of Self-defence, be repelled, or the time would soon come when *even Quakers*, as such, would cease to exist. And a just sense, that *the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong*, will surely justify the applying to Heaven to aid the honest endeavours of the injured, against the invader of his rights.

Blessed are the Peace-makers; for they shall be called, or accounted as *the children of God;* for he is the God of Peace. By cultivating this peaceful,—this friendly disposition, they would be most eminently qualified for becoming the subjects of *the Messiah's kingdom*—as *a kingdom of righteousness and peace*—of peace and good will to men.

A state of suffering, though not entirely, incompatible with the ideas which the Jews had formed, of those glorious times, which they were then expecting, was not what they imagined would take place, at least to any considerable degree. If opposition, however, should possibly arise, they fully expected that, under the conduct of *their Messiah*, it would soon subside and terminate, in the completion of their most sanguine hopes. But the doctrine of Jesus, upon this subject, taught them what, by referring to the history of their ancestors, they might previously have known, that *a state of suffering* was, at no period of their history, a mark of Divine displeasure; that as formerly persecution and violence from wicked and unreasonable men, was the lot of their ancestors; so they must not now expect to be exempt from them. *Blessed*, or happy, *are they who are persecuted for righteousness sake, for their's*, says Our Saviour, *is the kingdom Heaven. Blessed are ye when men shall revile you and persecute you falsely for my sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad; for great is your reward in heaven; for so persecuted they the Prophets which were before you.*

Having in these Beatitudes, announced to his hearers, the qualifications which were peculiarly calculated to correct the prejudices of the Jews, upon the subject of *the nature of the Messiah's kingdom*, and shewn them, in a concise, but energetic manner, what were the dispositions which would qualify them for becoming the subjects of it; our Lord proceeds, with an admirable unity of design, and in close connection with them, to awaken the attention of his hearers to the importance of their situation *as Jews*, and their supereminent advantages, for the promotion and extension of the knowledge of what he had been teaching them, concerning *the true nature of the Messiah's kingdom*, and of the dangerous consequences to themselves, as *a nation*, of not making a right use of those advantages.—V. 13. *Ye are the salt of the Earth;* * *but if the salt*

* The situation of the Jewish Nation, with respect to the Nations which surrounded them both *at* and before the time of our Saviour, gives a peculiar propriety

salt hath lost its savour, or its saltness, *wherewith shall it be salted,* or rather how shall it recover its saltness? *It is thence-forth good for nothing, but to be cast out,* or thrown away, *and trodden under foot by men,* i. e. as the words seem fairly to imply when considered, in connection with the preceding and subsequent context and, more particularly with the 19th. and 20th. verses of this chapter. Ye Jews, in the present state of the world, *are yet,* as you have, by the favor of providence, hitherto been, from the earliest period of your history—*the salt of the Earth*—the only depositaries for the preservation of the knowledge of God, among the Nations of the Earth. *But if the salt hath lost its saltness,* or is become insipid—if *by your traditions,* afterwards, in this

propriety and beauty to the Metaphors here adopted as applied to them *Nationally,* and it is so well described by the learned Dr. John Leland, as to be particularly deserving of the judicious Reader's attention. "It pleased God," says he, "in his great wisdom and goodness towards mankind, to make "discoveries of his will, not merely to a few particular persons, but to a "whole Nation, set a part as *a preservative* against the spreading Idolatry "which was in danger of becoming *universal.* By an extraordinary "interposition, a constitution of a peculiar kind was established; the "fundamental principle of which was, the acknowledgement and adoration "of the one living and true God, and of him only. And to give weight "to this constitution, which was so different from those established by the "Legislators in other countries, who made Idolatry and Polytheism, the "basis of their several politics; its divine Authority was confirmed by "the most illustrious attestations, and by a series of wonderful acts, "which exhibited the most amazing displays of his unequalled power and "glory. Such was the Mosiac constitution, which was introduced, with "a glorious triumph over Idol Deities, even in Egypt, the principal seat "of Idolatry, and was attended with such circumstances as were particularly "fitted to engage the attention of mankind. The people amongst whom "this constitution and polity were erected, were not placed in a remote, "obscure corner of the Earth; but, in such a situation as was admirably "fitted for diffusing the knowledge of their Religion and Laws. They "were placed in the centre of the then known World, between Egypt and "Arabia, on the one hand, and Syria, Chaldea, and Assyria on the other; "among whom the first great kingdoms were erected, and from whence "knowledge and learning seem to have been derived to the western Nations. "Nor were the Israelites themselves, a very small and contemptible people. "Considering the amazing multiplication of their Nation, they bore no "inconsiderable proportion to the numbers of the rest of mankind, in "those ages of the World. And their peculiar polity, together with the "extraordinary acts of the divine Providence towards them, had a natural "tendency to put the neighbouring people upon making enquiry into "their Religion and Laws, which would be apt to lead them to the "acknowledgment and adoration of the one true God; and to discover

this very Sermon, particularly specified, you have made void the laws of God and so corrupted them, as to render them of no effect; you will cease to answer the purposes of Salt *for preservation*, and being become insipid, or of no use, you will be thrown away and trodden under foot.

In the following verse, Our Lord changes the metaphor, but still expresses the same sentiment, under the sublimest of images. Ver. 14. *Ye are the light of the World; a City which is set*, or built, *upon a Hill cannot be hid.* i. e. Your situation for communicating light to the world around you, is as conspicuous as a City which is built upon an eminence and cannot be concealed.

These verses have indeed, by the generality of Commentators been applied to the Disciples of Jesus, *as Ministers of the Gospel*, and they without doubt were, in the Councils of

" to them, the folly and unreasonableness of their own superstition and " idolatry. And that this was really part of the design which the divine " wisdom had in view, in his dispensations towards the People of Israel, " appeareth from several passages of Scripture;" the most remarkable of which referred to by this learned Writer, is the following.—Deut. iv. 5. *Behold I have taught you statutes and judgments, even as the Lord my God commanded me; keep therefore and do them, for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the Nations which shall hear all these statutes, and say: surely this great Nation is a wise and understanding people. What Nation is there so great who hath God so nigh unto them, as the Lord our God is, in all things that we call upon him for.* See Leeland's Advantage and Necessity of the Christian Revelation, pages 400, 401. Vol. I.

Very remarkable to the same purpose is what Dr. Ellis, in his knowledge of divine things, from Revelation, not from reason and nature, has said upon this subject, page 122. " What not a little contributed to the preservation " of knowledge in the East was God's continuing to reveal himself to the " Jews, so that in process of time, the little spot of *Jewry* was the only " place where the true God was known and taught. And some beams of " this divine wisdom could not but shine forth from time to time upon the " neighbouring people who conversed with them. Accordingly, whenever " we find a people begin to revive in literature, it was owing to one of " these causes; either to some tranmigrators from those parts coming and " settling among them; or else to their going thither for instruction. From " these fountains they always had it, and at this fire the Nations of the World " lighted their own. There is no instance to be given to the contrary. " Hither Athens and afterwards Rome, came in quest of knowledge and " instruction. These were the schools and masters of the World. And though " our accounts of *Asia* are but short and defective, yet what remains there are, " as also their traditions, even in *China*, trace their original and oracles " westward, which is the fullest confirmation of the *Mosaic* history, and " of the propagation of knowledge by instruction only."

Heaven,

Heaven, intended to be *the salt of the Earth* and *the lights of the World*. But the question is whether, at the period when our Lord delivered this Sermon upon the Mount, these expressions could have then been applicable to them, in that sense, any more than to the rest of their countrymen. Dr. George Campbell has very justly observed, "that the Apostles "were not yet qualified for teaching the system of doctrine "implied under the name *Gospel*; because in fact, they did not "know it themselves. They had then no notion of a Messiah, "but as a temporal Prince and mighty Conqueror; or of his "kingdom but as a secular Monarchy, more extensive than, but "of the same nature with those which had preceded; to wit, "the Assyrian, the Persian, the Macedonian Empires, or that "which was in being at the time, the Romans. Not one of his "hearers could have been more prejudiced than the Apostles "themselves were, at that time, against a suffering Saviour, who "was to expire in agonies upon the Cross. The doctrine of "the Gospel is manifestly what the Apostles were not qualified "to teach, till they were enlightened by the descent of the "Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, after our Lords's "Ascension."

These remarks of this very able Writer, are so manifestly founded in truth, that not to admit them, would be to contradict the whole tenor of the Gospel History. Indeed this very Sermon upon the Mount, contains very sufficient evidence that the Disciples of Jesus were not, particularly, and exclusively meant by *the salt of the Earth* and *the light of the World* AS MINISTERS OF THE GOSPEL; for, had that been the case, would our Lord have immediately afterwards addressed them, as persons who thought, that to promote their ambitious views, the eternal laws of morality were to be dispensed with? Would he have thought it necessary to correct, in so particular a manner, *the erroneous traditions*, mentioned in the 21st. and following verses, if the Disciples had answered this description? Besides, from whence could they have attained such a superiority of knowledge, beyond the rest of their countrymen? for it is evident, from the History, that the Disciples had but just joined him, and they [illegible] hitherto, at least, possessed no means of obtaining [illegible] ge as this opinion supposes. The real [illegible] ord had no reference to *the knowledge* [illegible] simply to that knowledge which,

as Jews and as *the peculiar people of God*, they had possessed; by which they were very appositely described, when compared with the state of the rest of mankind, as *the salt of the Earth* and *the light of the World*, and consequently if they improved their advantages, were better qualified both for the reception and the diffusion of that *additional light*, which it was the great object of his mission as *the Messiah*, to communicate to them.

Our Saviour's respresenting the Jews, under these similitudes, seems to have arisen from his great regard for them, as *a Nation*, and from his earnest solicitude for their improving the advantages of which, by the special favor of providence, they had hitherto been possessed. Upon a nearer prospect of the calamities which were about to overtake them, he appears to have been uncommonly affected at the thought of their having wilfully rejected all the means of saving them, from their approaching ruin; among which none of the least was, his endeavouring to rouse them to a just sense of their important perogatives, as *the salt of the Earth* and *the light of the World*. *O Jerusalem! Jerusalem! thou that killest the Prophets and stonest those who are sent unto thee; how often would I have gathered thy Children together as a Hen gathereth her Chickens under her wings, and ye would not.* As he told them upon that occasion, *their house was left unto them desolate;* so he intimates, in the instance under consideration, by telling them that *if the salt hath lost its savor*, or saltness, *it is thenceforth good for nothing*, but to be cast out and trodden under foot. This was, unhappily and notoriously the fact, with respect to this infatuated and incorrigible Nation. They soon lost their distinguished pre-eminence, particularly in a religious point of view, and were, and still continue to be, even to a proverb, *cast out and trodden under foot*, the objects of contempt and derision to all Nations. "Jerusalem," says Mr. Kett, "has been constantly "trodden down of the Gentiles, the Romans, the Saracens, "and the Turks. Its antient inhabitants have been expelled "and persecuted, and its holy places have been polluted. "The Eagles of idolatrous Rome, the Crescent of the "impostor Mahomet, and the Banner of Popery, carried by "the Crusaders have been successively displayed amidst the "ruins of the Sanctuary of Jehovah, for nearly 1800 years." See Kett's History, the Interpreter of Prophecy, Vol. I. p. 244.

If

If the preceding interpretation of the 13th. and 14th. verses, in the chapter under consideration, shall, from a careful attention to the situation and circumstances of things, when our Lord delivered this Sermon, be found to be just, there cannot be any difficulty in giving to the verse immediately following, a precise and determinate meaning; a meaning which is replete with sound reasoning, and which perfectly harmonizes with the metaphor of the Jews being *the light of the World.*—V. 15. *Men do not light a candle and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick and it giveth light to all that are in the house.* As if he had said, ye Jews have been appointed, by providence, to be *the lights of the World*; upon the same principle, and for the same purpose that men light a candle in their houses, namely, that all who are in them, may enjoy the benefit of its light. This being the design of men, in their humble spheres of action, in common life; it is, for a like purpose, but a far more noble and important one, that God has placed you, in the supereminent situation, which in a moral and religious view, you now enjoy. In this view, how natural, and how forcible, is the conclusion which our Lord draws from this reasoning!—*So let your light shine before men*; you who are THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD, *that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.*

Having thus pointed out to the Jews, the superior importance of their situation among the nations of the world, under the metaphors of *salt to preserve*, and of *light to communicate* the knowledge of God, and having urged upon them, the importance of improving the advantages which they possessed, and, *which as Jews*, could not but have been peculiarly interesting to them; our Lord proceeds, in the next verse, with the same regard to the sentiments which they held, concerning *the nature of the Messiah's kingdom*, which he had already, so pointedly displayed, and particularly guards them against imagining that to promote their ambitious and self-interested purposes, it was his design to introduce, or, in any way to encourage, a relaxation of the eternal laws of justice, equity, and righteousness.—v. 17. *Think not that I am come to destroy the Law and the Prophets*; very far from it: *I am not come to destroy* EITHER *but to fulfil* BOTH;—to give perfection to the one, and to accomplish what the others have written of me; *for verily I say unto you,*

till

till Heaven and Earth pass, one iota, or one tittle, shall in no wise pass from the law till all be fulfilled. And still farther to let them know, of what immense and essential importance these eternal laws of morality, viz. *the lights by which they were to shine before men*, in his estimation were; he adds, what must for ever do the highest honor to him and to his religion.—v. 19. *Whosoever, therefore, shall break one of the least of these commandments*, (of the moral law) *and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of Heaven; but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of Heaven.* He then adds, with a peculiar reference to the lax morality, and the vitious conduct of *the Jewish Rulers*—of those who were *the depositaries* of the knowledge which then existed in the world;—*for I say unto you, that except your righteousness shall very far exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees*, for so the original word signifies, *ye shall in no case*, or, upon no account whatever, *enter into the kingdom of Heaven*: ye will be wholly disqualified for being *the subjects of that kingdom* which I am about to set up. *

The

* "It has been said by the Enemies of Christianity, that it inculcates "a scheme of morality wholly impracticable and enthusiastic; inconsistent "with the feelings of human nature, and the business of human life. On "this charge," says Mr. Graves, "it may be observed, that it is most certain "Christianity does not give any reasonable ground to suppose that it "encourages men to forsake the necessary business, or the useful relations of "human life; that it supposes the stations of husband and wife, and children; "of masters and servants; of rulers and subjects; of rich and poor; of "teachers and learners; and that it gives such rules for human conduct, in "all these different situations as require strict integrity, active benevolence, "unassuming humility, patience and resignation; in short, every quality "which tends to promote the happiness of the individual, and the welfare "of society; rules which if practised, would make the whole world, "a scene of virtue, piety, and peace.

"It is equally certain that industry—attention to the interests of those with "whom we are connected, or for whom we are concerned, far from being "prohibited or discountenanced, are recommended and even enjoined. It "may easily be shewn that those passages which seem most strongly to condemn "the world, the things of the world, and the cares of the world; mean "only to condemn *the sordid pursuits*, and vicious pleasures, and excessive "love of the world; to condemn sensuality, ambition, covetousness, "extreme solicitude, repining at the dispensations, and distrusting the "providence of God. But while we vindicate the Gospel from such "misrepresentations as would pervert its exalted, but rational precepts, into "fanatical rants; we must never forget that its precepts and its motives,

"are

The remaining part of this most excellent Sermon, was plainly intended to correct, in detail, the highly vitiated morality of the Jews, in points of great and essential importance; to introduce, in its stead, such a purity and rectitude of morals as should extend to the whole conduct, *internal* as well as *external*; such as would render them, the worthy subjects of *the Messiah's kingdom;* such, in a word, as would make them *to shine*, like the great luminary, from which all light is borrowed, *as lights in the world*—be productive of the best effects, in promoting the knowledge of God and his Son among the Nations of the Earth, and fit them for that final state of happiness, in a future world, which it was, *the final object*, of the establishment of his Kingdom upon Earth, to promote!

This view of *the general nature and design* of our Lord's Sermon upon the Mount, and particularly, of the Beatitudes and what immediately follows them; it may be presumed, may be sufficient to excite the admiration of every person whose moral taste is not vitiated; of the wisdom which dictated it—sufficient to satisfy every ingenuous and impartial enquirer, that it contains every *internal character*, of its having a peculiar reference to *the state of the Jews*, at the time it was delivered, and to the prejudices and sentiments which then, universally, prevailed among them, concerning *the nature of the Messiah's kingdom*. Of no other people, but *the Jewish Nation*, could it, with such propriety, have been said, that they were *the salt of the Earth* and *the light of the World*. To no other people, but *them*, could the Beatitudes have so well been addressed, as the opposite principles had taken such full possession of their minds, as our Saviour well

" are really exalted, far exalted above the general ideas and general practice " of mankind; that it proposes the fear and the love of God, as the leading " principles of action, to which every other motive must be subordinate, " and by which every action ought to be controled. That these sacred " principles are not to confine their operations to occasional prayers; to a " temporary and transient influence in the church or the closet; but to " regulate our conduct in active life, as constantly as in religious " retirement. This will seem to a worldly or depraved mind, enthusiastic; " but the true Philosopher, and the enlightened Statesman, know that the " perpetual effort at improvement, the humble and self-distrusting " watchfulness which those precepts of the Gospel require, most directly " tend to promote the perfection of the individual and the happiness of " society." See Graves on Enthusiasm, pages, 305, 306.

knew, would be the chief hinderances of their receiving him as *the Messiah!*

The effect which this discourse of our Lord had upon the minds of the hearers, was such, as might naturally have been expected, from the use of a language, which must have appeared to them so *new and extraordinary*. The Evangelist has pointed this out, in a very impressive and striking manner; for he says, chap. vii. 28, 29. that *when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were* ASTONISHED *at his doctrine; for he taught them as one having authority, but not as the Scribes.*

Having thus laid the foundation of his instructions concerning the moral and religious design of *the coming of the Messiah*, as far as *the prejudices of the Jews*, and the circumstances of things, at this early period would admit; and having endeavoured to rouse them to an attention to the peculiar importance of their situation, for the preservation and extension of the knowledge of God; our Lord proceeds, in the order of the history, to give such proofs of his being *the Messiah*, as were more immediately adapted to arrest their attention to what he had farther to communicate to them.

The viiith. and ixth. Chapters of St. Matthew, which immediately follow the Sermon upon the Mount, are chiefly employed in the relation of various miracles, which Jesus wrought for the benefit of his countrymen, and more particularly, with a view to engage them to acknowledge him as *the Messiah*. This relation, the judicious Reader will observe, is closed with a remark of the Historian, viz. that *Jesus went about all the Cities and Villages, teaching in their Synagogues, and preaching the Gospel*, or good news *of the kingdom*, i. e. OF THE KINGDOM OF THE MESSIAH, *and healing every sickness, and every disease, among the people.* While he was engaged in this important office, the Evangelist goes on to relate, that *when Jesus saw the multitudes* which followed him, *he was moved with compassion towards them, because they fainted and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd.* Deeply affected with the deplorable condition of the great body of the people; either from the neglect, or from the intolerable impositions of their Rulers, *who*, as appears from the course of the History, *bound heavy burthens upon men's shoulders which they themselves would not touch*

touch with one of their fingers ; the importance and difficulty of his undertaking, very naturally, upon this occasion, occurred to him, and he thus addressed his Disciples.—v. 37. *The Harvest truly is great, but the labourers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the Harvest, that he may send forth labourers into his Harvest.*

In this connection, the xth. Chapter, with singular propriety, opens with an account of Jesus's investing the twelve Apostles, whose names are particularly mentioned, with *power over unclean Spirits; of healing all kinds of diseases*, and more particularly, with his giving them *a commission* to announce to their countrymen, *the approach of the Messiah's kingdom.*—v. 1. *And when he had called to him his twelve Disciples, he gave them power over unclean Spirits; to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness, and all manner of disease. And he commanded them saying; go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not; but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, and as ye go, preach, saying;* THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN *is at hand.* When our Lord here says, *the kingdom of Heaven is at hand;* it will readily occur to the attentive Reader, that it is, *precisely*, the same language which he made use of, when he began his Ministry. And, no one can entertain a doubt of its relating to *the same event*, which he had there announced, *as approaching*, namely, to *the coming of* THE KINGDOM *of the Messiah.* Nor is it less evident that when, at the close of the preceding chapter, he is described, as going *through every city and village preaching the Gospel*, or good news of *the kingdom;* he was performing the same office, which he had here, particularly, commissioned his Apostles to execute.

In giving his Disciples a commission of such great importance; it was evidently necessary, that Jesus should, at the same time, give them such directions, for the regulation of their conduct, as the nature of the service in which they were to be engaged, and the peculiar circumstances and exigences of the times, so urgently required. These directions are given from the 7th to the 16th verse; and he then goes on to tell them, that such would be the difficulties of their employment, and the peculiar circumstances of the times, that it would require the utmost exertion of all their prudence and discretion to discharge the duties of their office with

success.—v. 16. *Behold I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves; be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves.* In the 17th and following verses, he informs them of *the extreme difficulties and hardships* which they would have to encounter, in the upright and faithful discharge of their duty.—*But beware of men; for they will deliver you up to the councils, and they shall scourge you in their Synagogues, and ye shall be brought before Governors and Kings for my sake, for a testimony to them and the Gentiles. But when they deliver you up, take no thought how, or what ye shall speak; for it shall be given you in that same hour,* or rather, at that same time, *what ye shall speak; for it is not ye that speak, but the spirit of your Father which speaketh in you. Moreover, the brother shall deliver up the brother to death, and the father the child; and children shall rise up against their parents, and they shall cause them to be put to death.* And to shew, in the strongest manner possible, the extreme violence of the opposition which they must expect to meet with, in the faithful discharge of their duty; he, in the 22d verse, adds, *ye shall be hated by all men, for my name's sake.* *

Here the judicious and attentive Reader cannot fail to observe, to use the language of Mr. Richards, upon another occasion of a similar nature, that "he represents to them "that they were destined to the most heavy calamities, "which human nature can endure—not only to prisons, to "stripes, and to death, but to the general hatred of "mankind." And he very properly adds, "surely the "spirit of truth and a certain prescience of the efficacy "of the divine assistance, with which he intended to support "them, could alone have prompted him to make such an "unwelcome representation, at a moment when every "encouragement was required. An impostor, in commending "a pretended revelation to the zeal of his deluded followers, "would have endeavoured to fire their imaginations, by

* "The full accomplishment of these things," says Dr. Lardner, "is "well known to Christians, from the Book of the Acts, and the Epistles "of the New Testament. The Apostles of Jesus met with great difficulties "in preaching the Gospel; and the converts made by them were exposed "to many sufferings. Peter and John, and all the Apostles were brought "before the Jewish Council, and were imprisoned, and beaten, and "farther threatened." See Lardner's Antient Jewish and Heathen Testimonies, Vol. I. p. 52. 4th. Edit.

"expatiating

" expatiating upon its final triumphs, and delineating, in " the brightest colours, scenes of permanent prosperity and " splendour; while the intermediate difficulties to which " its propagation might appear to be subject, would have " been, either entirely omitted, or represented in the weakest " and most general terms, as unworthy of the serious " consideration of sincere and able supporters." See Richards's Bampton Lectures, p. 200.

These observations of Mr. Richards, as hath been observed, are applied to another occasion, viz. to the time when the crucifixion of Jesus approached, and his Disciples were upon the eve of being disheartened and perplexed by the apparent ruin of their hopes; but they seem, with at least equal force, to apply to his declarations to them, at this early period. And indeed it would be extremely difficult, if not impossible for a person, who does not fully enter into the sentiments and prejudices of the Disciples of Jesus, upon the subject of *the coming of the Messiah*, to imagine the extreme surprize and astonishment which this remarkable prediction, of the mighty sufferings which they would have to encounter, must necessarily have produced upon their minds; for though they could not, perhaps, even upon their own principles, have expected to have been entirely exempted from all sufferings, in the full attainment of the great object of their ambition; yet it was not possible for them to have entertained any idea of such mighty opposition, at least, from their own countrymen, as to be delivered up to the great councils of their nation; *to be scourged* even in *their Synagogues*, and to be *hated by all men* for proclaiming tidings, which were equally grateful and expected, with an ardor, at least equal to their own, *by the whole Jewish Nation.*

Our Lord appears most evidently to have been fully sensible of the effect which his prediction, of such mighty opposition, from a quarter so entirely unexpected, must necessarily have had upon their minds. He therefore, with the most singular propriety, besides *the general assurance* which he had given them in the 19th and 20th verses, of assistance from above, as the exigencies of the times might require; immediately proceeded to offer to their particular attention, such farther considerations of an encouraging nature, as might enable them, with becoming fortitude and magnanimity,

magnanimity, to bear the troubles to which, he had just told them, they should be exposed, in the faithful execution of the duties of their office.

The first consolatory consideration which our Lord offered to the attention of his Disciples was, what could not, in such circumstances, but have had a considerable effect upon their minds, namely, that by perseverance in the faithful discharge of their duty, they would not fail *ultimately* of success.—v. 22. *He that shall endure to the end, the same shall be saved.* The object which the Disciples had principally in view, in joining our Lord, and in accepting *a commission* from him, most undoubtedly was, *the coming of the Messiah*; and they could not have understood his declaration, that by *enduring to the end* of their troubles, *they should be saved*, in any other sense, than that, notwithstanding the opposition which they should meet with, they should obtain the great object of their wishes. At the same time, it is not improbable, our Lord had a farther and a more noble view, in these words, viz. that by a faithful discharge of their duty, their *final salvation* would likewise be secured. But, even in the former sense, his language plainly conveyed to them this very important intimation, that they must not expect the attainment of the great object of their wishes, without diligently, and faithfully, performing the duties which the nature of the service, in which they were engaged, might require; whatever difficulties they might meet with, in the execution of that service.

Another consoling consideration, of great importance, in the trying circumstances, in which they would, sometimes, find themselves was, that in very pressing exigencies, it would be lawful, and even necessary, to save themselves from the dangers to which they might be exposed,, by flying from them.—v. 23. *When they persecute you in this City, flee ye to another.* They were not, unnecessarily, to expose themselves to danger; nor, when they were unavoidably exposed to it, were they to neglect all honourable means of escaping from them. *

But neither of these considerations would, of themselves, have been sufficient to have animated the Disciples of Jesus to

* How extremely remote was this direction from what would have been given by one who was under the influence of Enthusiasm? Enthusiasts are commonly observed to court, instead of flying from persecution!

endure

endure the troubles which he had taught them to expect, without having their minds particularly directed to *a given period of time*, WHEN they should have their hopes of the attainment of the great object of all their expectations realized; when *the kingdom of Heaven*, or of *the Messiah*, should no longer be *at hand*, but actually *come*. Our Lord appears to have been thoroughly sensible of the necessity of a declaration to this purpose; for he not only tells them that they should *ultimately* be successful in their expectation of *the coming of the Messiah*, and that, in the mean time, it would be lawful, and even expedient, in cases of imminent danger, to *flee from one City to another*; but he immediately added, and that in the most pointed and explicit, but at the same time, in the most cautious terms, that *they should not have gone over the Cities of Israel till the Son of Man*, the Messiah, *came*. He did not, it must be carefully observed, say that he himself was *the Messiah*; but only that *the Son of Man*, THE MESSIAH, would come, before they had, fully completed their commission of *going over the Cities of Israel*. v. 23. *When they persecute you, in this City, flee to another; for verily I say unto you, ye shall not have gone over the Cities of Israel, till the Son of Man be come*; till you be fully satisfied that your expectations of *his coming*, as *the Messiah*, be fully accomplished.* Such an assurance as this, to men whose views were, at that period, so strongly and invariably directed towards the expectation of *a Messiah to come*, was absolutely and indispensably necessary; and it is, in the highest degree probable, that if it had not been given, they must, upon their own principles, and indeed, upon the common principles of human nature, have forsaken him, notwithstanding the high regard which they may be supposed to have entertained, for the peculiar excellence of his personal character; for without such an assurance, they would have wanted the most

* The form of the expression with which this assurance is introduced, is not unworthy of notice; *Verily I say unto you*; for it is never used but upon occasions, when Jesus wished what he said to be strongly impressed upon his hearers; and this was more particularly the case when he spoke of *his coming*: thus, Matt. xvi. 28. VERILY I SAY UNTO YOU, *there be some standing here, who shall not taste of death till they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.* See also Mark, ix. 1. And, tantamount to this, is the expression of St. Luke, in the parallel passage.—Ch. ix. 27. I TELL YOU OF A TRUTH, *there be some standing here, who shall not taste of death till they see the kingdom of God.*

essential,

essential, and to them, the most powerful motive, for facing the dangers which Jesus, upon this occasion, had so forcibly presented to their minds.

It is not easy to imagine that the Disciples of Jesus could, in such circumstances as have been described, have entertained any other idea, of *his coming*, here mentioned, than of *the coming of the Messiah*, or of *the Kingdom*, which he had announced to be *at hand;* for to *that coming*, it is evident, beyond all reasonable dispute, their whole attention was *originally* directed. With a belief that Jesus might possibly be *the Messiah*, they had joined him, and they lent a willing and anxious attention to his instructions upon that head, in the hope that he would give them such information as they wanted: and the very circumstance of their having been invested with *a commission* to announce its approach, naturally led them to understand *the coming of the Son of Man*, in the sense of *the coming of the Messiah*. *As ye go, preach, saying*, THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS AT HAND. And here, in the 23d verse, he tells them, most evidently, for their encouragement to perseverance in the faithful discharge of their duty, in the midst of uncommon difficulties, that *they should not have gone over the Cities of Israel, till the Son of Man*, the Messiah, *came*.

What can deserve the name of demonstration of the true meaning of a Writer, if this does not—or how can any other sense be possibly put upon the expression—*the coming of the Son of Man*, and more especially, in this connexion, than *the coming of the Messiah*, without violating all the rules of good writing, and rendering it impossible to ascertain what his real meaning was? If Jesus had meant, by this phrase, as has been contended, *the second and glorious coming of the Son of Man in the clouds, to judge all Mankind, at the last day;* it would at that period, at least, have been utterly impossible for the Disciples to have understood him. And, what is still more striking and is particularly worthy of observation is, that if they can be supposed to have so understood him, they must have, *immediately*, and without hesitation have forsaken him, as *an impostor;* as not answering their expectations; for they *then*, most incontestably, entertained ideas which were, totally incompatible, with such an event. Nor is it easy to imagine how any one claiming *the character of the Messiah*, should have had, the most

most distant conception of such an event taking place, in his own time, any more than his followers; much less that, in a series of arguments manifestly intended for their encouragement, under peculiar difficulties, he would have made use of one which, from the very nature of it, must either have been wholly unintelligible to them; or must have had a direct tendency to discourage all their expectations of his being *the Messiah.*

To these arguments, which our Lord made use of, to support his Disciples, under the gloomy prospect which he had so pointedly set before them; he added another, which if not, in their estimation, of equal force with the preceding ones, was, at least, admirably adapted to reconcile them to the difficulties of their situation, however hard they might appear to them; for in the 24th verse, he tells them, in terms which are sufficiently significant and expressive, that he himself had the prospect of encountering, at least equal, if not superior difficulties, to any to which they might be exposed. *The Disciple is not above his Master, nor the Servant above his Lord: it is enough for the Disciple that he be as his Master, and the Servant as his Lord. If they have called the Master of the house Beelzebub, much more* is it to be expected that *they will call those of his houshold,* by the same opprobrious names. *

Nor must it be omitted, that besides the intimation of Jesus, that no troubles would await them, but such as he himself would have to undergo; he turns their attention, with the most striking propriety, to the great object which, at all times, ought to direct their actions and the whole of their conduct; viz. *the fear of God,* on whose favor or displeasure, their happiness or misery, both here and hereafter, would ultimately depend.—v. 26. *Fear them not therefore; for there is nothing covered which shall not be revealed, and hid, which shall not be known. What I tell you in darkness, that speak ye in the light; and what ye hear in the ear,* or in private, *that speak ye upon the house tops: And fear not them who kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul; but rather fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in Hell.*

* The Evangelist Matthew, towards the close of the preceding Chapter, states it as *a fact*, that they had so denominated our Lord.—Ch. ix. 34. *He casteth out Devils through Beelzebub the Prince of the Devils.*

What a powerful and engaging consideration was this, to the active and faithful discharge of the duties of their commission? The powers of language, or even of imagination, cannot well conceive a greater! And, that it might have the fullest effect upon their minds, he farther reminded them, for their still greater encouragement, in the performance of it, that they were under the immediate inspection of the all-seeing eye of God; without whose knowledge, or permission, the most inconsiderable events could not happen.—v. 29. *Are not two Sparrows sold for a farthing, and one,* even *of them,* trifling as they may, in human estimation appear, *shall not fall to the ground, without* the knowledge or permission of *your Father:* and to enforce, with yet greater effect, this important doctrine upon their minds, he moreover told them that *the very hairs of their head were all numbered. Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many Sparrows:* i. e. as Dr. Clarke has very judiciously paraphrased it, "be not "therefore afraid what man can do unto you—ye are of "much more worth than the other creatures upon earth. "And if nothing can happen, even to the meanest of those "creatures, without the providence and Direction of God, "how much less to you?" *

The two verses, immediately following, appear very significantly to be declarative of Jesus being *the Messiah,* though expressed in the language of caution; and they seem to have had, a peculiar propriety in them, as they regarded the Apostles, in the situation in which they *then* were;—as they very strongly intimated, the confidence which he had, in the integrity of his own character, and consequently, as they had a tendency to increase their reverence for him and their belief that he might be *the Messiah.* They likewise led them to consider the design of his mission, as having *a peculiar reference to a future state,* and the importance of their adhering to him with fidelity, whatever might be the obloquy or reproach to which such an adherence might expose them. verses 32, 33. *Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father who is in Heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father who is in Heaven!*

* See Dr. Clarke's Paraphrase in loc.

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Our Lord having, as has been noticed at large, informed his Disciples of the difficulties and hardships, to which a faithful adherence to him, as his Disciples, would expose them; and having, in the verses just cited, represented to them, the consequences, to their future and everlasting welfare, of their receiving or rejecting of him as *the Messiah*; he now, as if fearful, least they should not have sufficiently adequate ideas of the dangers of the service, in which they were engaged, again reminds them of them, informing them, particularly, that both he and they would meet with a very different reception from what they imagined, and that the consequences, even of the faithful discharge of the duties of their office, would be very far from being such as they expected. They conceived, and very naturally, with the views which they had, of *the nature of the Messiah's character*, that the Jews would pay a willing attention to their message concerning it, and that their nation would, by his means, be blessed with the most unbounded prosperity. To correct this *erroneous opinion*, and to prevent the ill effects which the mighty opposition of the Jews, and the calamities they would have to meet with, might have upon them, he thus forewarns them of them.—v. 34. *Think not that I am come to send peace*, the peace which you so earnestly expect, *upon Earth*, or rather upon the land. *I came, not to send peace but a sword;* * *for I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a man's foes shall be those of his own house.*

In these circumstances, he tells them what, upon the supposition of his having a divine commission, will stand

* It seems highly probable that our Lord here alludes to the sentiments which the Jewish Nation held, of the universal peace which would immediately succeed the establishment of *the Messiah's kingdom*. But he here tells them, that it was not *peace* but *a sword* that they must expect; the sword which would go through the land and destroy them.

"Our Saviour must here be understood," says Mr. Barrow, in his Bampton Lectures, pages 5, 6. "to express, not *the design and purpose* of "his appearance upon earth, but its *accidental consequences*; what would "arise, not from any imperfection in his revelation, but from human "weakness and passions. As if he had said, though the Gospel is "intended by its Author, and calculated by its nature, to produce "benevolence and peace among men; yet will its rejection, or perversion, "be too often the occasion of animosity and contention, persecution and "bloodshed."

the test of the severest criticism, as being perfectly agreeable to the most sound philosophy, and most congenial to the genuine and unadulterated apprehensions of mankind.—v. 37. *He that loveth father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me; and, he that loveth son or daughter more than me, is not worthy of me; and he that taketh not his cross,* that shrinketh from his duty, on account of any sufferings which he may meet with, *is not worthy of me. He that findeth his life,* by deserting the post to which duty has called him, *shall lose it, and he that loseth his life for my sake, shall find it.* But how find it? Why, says St. John, in a passage which appears to be an accurate paraphrase of this—*he shall keep*—or rather preserve *it, unto life eternal.*

The whole of this reasoning, every one must immediately perceive, was peculiarly seasonable and admirably adapted to the situation and circumstances, in which the Apostles would find themselves placed, in the execution of the commission, which they had received from Jesus. And, it is worthy of particular observation, that what he said to them in the 37th and following verses, is founded upon that most solid and important maxim, that *God is rather to be obeyed than man,*—or, that duty to him is, at all times, paramount to every other consideration. And, in order that they might see this, in the fullest, and most advantageous light—he goes on to reason with them, in the following energetic terms. *He that receiveth you, receiveth me, and he that receiveth me, receiveth him that sent me.* As if he had said—If those who receive you, to whom I have given a commission, receive me; it will necessarily and unavoidably follow that if, I am *the Ambassador of God,* and bear about me, *his credentials*—no man can reject me or contemn my Authority, without rejecting the Authority of God himself who sent me;—Nor will they who treat me, or those to whom I have given a commission, with the respect to which, as *the Ambassadors of Heaven,* we are justly entitled, lose their reward.—v. 41, 42. *He that receiveth a Prophet, in the name of a Prophet, shall receive a Prophet's reward*—or the reward due to one who shall be honored with so distinguished a character—*and whosoever receiveth a righteous Man, in the name of a righteous Man, shall receive a righteous Man's reward.* And whosoever shall even *give to one of these little ones, a cup of cold Water* ONLY, to drink,

in

in the *name of a Disciple*; *Verily I say unto you, he shall, in no wise, lose his reward.*

If ever clearness and perspicuity were to be found in any writing, either antient or modern; surely this has a just and undeniable claim to these important and essential characteristics of good writing. What reasoning can be more close—or better adapted to the situation and circumstances of the Disciples of Jesus, at the moment of his giving them a commission to act, as *his Delegates and Apostles*, in announcing the approach of *the Messiah's Kingdom*, than the whole of this discourse? And at the same time that it stands distinguished, for clearness and perspicuity; it carries, in every part of it, such unequivocal marks of *genuine history*, as must leave, upon the mind of every one who considers it, with an impartial and unbiassed attention, no doubt of its authenticity—or a single suspicion that *the coming of the Son of Man*, in the 23d verse, which it was the principal object of this minute survey, to illustrate, can possibly relate to any other event than to *the coming of the Messiah.* *

Nor, must it be forgotten that, while it stands recommended to the notice of the judicious and impartial reader, for these essential qualities of good writing; it is no less distinguished for the striking picture, which it affords, both of the firmness and integrity of our Lord's character! So frightful a representation of the difficulties and hardships to which his disciples would, necessarily, be exposed, in the execution of the duties of their office, as even *to be hated by all men*, and that too, at a moment when their minds must have been considerably elated, from the circumstance of their having

* Dr. Lardner has a Sermon upon the meaning of the phrase *the Son of Man*, in the New Testament, and he very properly observes that it does not, of itself, signify *the Messiah*; but when our Lord connects with it, *his coming in his kingdom*; it is submitted to the judicious Reader's attentive consideration, whether the Disciples could possibly put any other meaning upon it than *the coming of the Messiah*; for, if they did not understand it in that sense; it is absolutely incomprehensible how the Apostles could have continued to adhere to him: And what is more, the use of a language, which did not convey the idea of *the coming of the Messiah*, would have had no effect in securing their attachment, at a moment, when, from the troubles which he had in the strongest colors presented before their eyes; it became indispensible! It must, however, be most carefully observed, that our Lord did not declare that he himself was *that Son of Man* THE MESSIAH; for that, upon the fairest principles of prudence, he, at this early period, most cautiously avoided.

• received

received *a commission* from him, to announce to their countrymen, *the approach of the Messiah's kingdom*, is utterly unlike the conduct of *an Impostor*, and, altogether, the reverse, even of the appearance of fraud or falsehood. And, it is particularly deserving of notice that, with this firmness and integrity of character, were blended the most pleasing and affecting traits, of the benevolence and humanity which he discovered, in affording them every degree of consolation and encouragement which the peculiarity of their situation, so urgently demanded, and, more particularly, in that most essential and important article, which was the grand foundation of all their hopes and expectations, and of their attachment to him, viz.—*the coming of the Messiah.*

These Observations the judicious and intelligent Reader will find, upon an attentive examination, are not the result of an artful design of enhancing the credit of Christianity, beyond what it has a just and undeniable claim to.—They are the natural and necessary deductions, arising from a narration of plain and uncontrovertible facts, and from a careful perusal of the chapter itself. If it be read and attended to as *an History*, and as *an History* of the claims of Jesus, on the one hand, to *the Character of the Messiah* and, of the prejudices and expectations of the Disciples, on the other, respecting those claims; it contains internal evidence of its true meaning, which the plainest understanding may readily perceive, and which the most subtle ingenuity can scarcely misapply. In one word, it is most evidently employed in apprizing the Disciples of the ardent and difficult service in which they had engaged, by accepting of a commission from him—in laying down rules for the regulation of their conduct, in the execution of their commission, and, in affording them such encouragement as their peculiar situations so urgently required!

But besides the internal proofs, drawn from the chapter itself, of the object of it—the Evangelist, in the beginning of the following chapter, has very distinctly stated it, in the following words—chap. xi. 1. *And it came to pass when Jesus had made an end of commanding*—or as the original word properly signifies—of *laying down rules*, for the regulation of the conduct of *the Disciples*, in the execution of their commission; *he departed thence to teach and to preach the Gospel*—or good news of the Kingdom, *in their Cities*: And in this connection the Evangelist introduces, an account of a message which

John

John the Baptist, while under confinement in prison, sent to Jesus, respecting *the nature* of his claims.—V. 2. *Now when John had heard, in the prison, the works of Christ*—or rather of Jesus, as there is reason to suspect it should have been; for he was not yet acknowledged as *the Christ*—or *the Messiah*—*he sent two of his Disciples and said to him*—*Art thou he that should come*, he whom we, *as Jews*, are anxiously expecting, as now about to appear,—*or are we to look for another?*

This Message of John the Baptist, is one, among a multiplicity of unequivocal proofs, of *the general expectation of the coming of the Messiah*, at the time, when Jesus made his appearance, in the world. And, his answer to the question of the Baptist, is well worthy of notice, not only as it shews, his cautious and guarded manner of conducting himself, when questioned, concerning *the true nature of his character*,—but, because it will afford an opportunity, of presenting to the attentive Reader, another *striking and incontestible proof*, of the true meaning of the phrase —*the kingdom of heaven*, in a connection which cannot be mistaken.

The messengers of John, it appears, from v. 7. addressed Jesus, in the hearing of the multitudes, and, upon this account, it was particularly necessary that he should be extremely cautious and guarded, with respect to the answer, which he should return to the Baptist's message. That he might have the desired information upon the subject of his query, Jesus, instead of *directly* and *explicitly* acknowledging himself to be *the Messiah*, referred them, to his excellent instructions, and to the many wonderful miracles, which he had wrought.—V. 4, 5. *Go and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see*—*The blind receive their sight*—*the lame walk*—*the lepers are cleansed*—*the deaf hear*—*the dead are raised up*, and, he adds, in exact harmony with the antient prophecy, concerning THE MESSIAH—*the poor have the Gospel preached to them!* The following verse seems to be particularly remarkable, as it appears to have a manifest allusion to the general prejudices of the Jews, respecting *the nature of the Messiah's character*,—v. 6. *Blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me.* As if he had said—Happy is the man who shall not be offended, at my present *humble appearance*—but shall own me to be the person, which my works declare me to be,

be, notwithstanding I have none of those worldly honors and emoluments to bestow, which are generally considered, as inseparably connected with *the coming of the Messiah.*

When our Lord had dispatched this message to John, he then addressed the multitudes concerning him, in terms, the most respectful and honorable to his Character, declaring that, *among those who were born of women, there had not arisen one, who was greater than John the Baptist.* But to shew, in the strongest point of view; the superior excellence of his own Character, and the superior importance of the establishment which he, as *the Messiah,* was about to set up, he adds,—*notwithstanding, he that is least in* THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN, *is greater than He.*

In the following chapter, upon occasion of our Lord's restoring sight and speech to a blind and dumb person, the Evangelical Historian remarks, that *the people were amazed and said, Is not this the Son of David*—in other words—Is not this *the Messiah,* whose lineal descendant he was? Such a question, from the mouth of the common people, roused the jealousy and excited an alarm, in the minds of *the Pharisees,* least they should be induced to acknowledge Jesus, as *the Messiah*; regardless of the proofs, of his being such, which he had just given them. Unable, however, to deny *the reality* of the miracle and, unwilling to suffer such a persuasion to get possession of the minds of the people; they chose malignantly to attribute the Miracle, to his connection with Demons.—v. 24. *This fellow doth not cast out Demons, but by Beelzebub—the Prince of the Demons.*

If ever language was capable of rousing an honest and virtuous indignation; especially when *the nature* of the Miracle which occasioned it, is considered, surely this was! But what was the Answer of Jesus? Why, he condescended to reason with them, upon the extreme absurdity of their supposition, and that, in a language which was, in the highest degree, cool and temperate, and fraught, with a strength of argument, which nothing could exceed.—v. 25. *Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand. And if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself,—how shall then his kingdom stand? And, if I, by Beelzebub, cast out Demons, by whom do your children cast them out?—therefore shall they be your Judges. But if I cast out Demons, by the Spirit*

Spirit or *power of God,—then the* KINGDOM OF GOD IS COME —or rather is coming *unto you.* *

The judicious and intelligent Reader will perceive that the malignant suggestions of the Pharisees, upon the occasion of our Lord's working this miracle, together with his answer, are here produced, principally, for the sake of the conclusion which he drew from his reasoning; viz. that *the kingdom of God was come near unto them;* for no doubt can well be entertained that, by *the kingdom of God,* is to be understood—*the coming of the kingdom of the Messiah;* as the question which the people put—*Is not this the Son of David?*—contained a very strong intimation that they suspected that Jesus was *the Messiah.*

After having made these remarks, so closely connected with the principal design of this work; it must not be omitted to be observed, that our Lord having, in his answer to the shameless and unprincipled cavils of the Pharisees, fully manifested, the utmost coolness and temper, and the most perfect self command, in replying to them, nevertheless, expressed his most unqualified sense, of the heinousness of

* The same word which is used here, is likewise used by St. Paul, 1 Thess. ii. 16. and is applied by him to *the destruction of Jerusalem,* which was then only *approaching.* The note of Dr. Benson upon that passage, appears to be worth the judicious Reader's attention. "The Greek word "here rendered *is come,* being an Aorist, I would render it; (it will come "upon them shortly.) And the Aorist seems to be used here, for the paulo "post futurum, to denote the near approach of their destruction." See Benson in loc. In like manner our Lord seems to have meant not that *the kingdom of God was come,* but only that it was *at hand,* agreeable to his declarations, that they *should not have gone over the cities of Israel until the Son of Man came;* and that *some were present who should not taste of death till the Son of Man came.* It may be objected to the interpretation here given, that *the kingdom of God* is said in xvii. Luke, 21. to be *within* or among *the Jews;* but this difficulty will be entirely removed, by considering to what period this declaration referred. The question of the Pharisees was, *when the kingdom of God,* or of the Messiah, *should come?* to which our Lord replied, that *it would not come with observation,* i. e. says Dr. Lardner, with outward pomp and splendour, visible in earthly kingdoms; but they shall say, in opposition to those who shall call the attention of their countrymen by saying *lo here, or lo there;* when the Jews are anxiously expecting *the Messiah* to deliver them from their enemies. *The kingdom of God,* or of THE MESSIAH, *is within,* or among, *you,* and shall be fully manifested by your being totally disappointed of your expectations of *a temporal Deliverer. As it was in the days of Noah, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of Man. Likewise also, as it was in the days of Lot; even thus shall it be when* the true nature of the coming of *the Son of Man is revealed.* But more of this hereafter.

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their crime, in ascribing miracles, of the purest benevolence, to a diabolical influence, as proceeding from the most rooted depravity, and the most hardened determination of resisting all evidence, however strong; which was not united to their ambitious and interested views! This, every one must acknowledge, he might have done, with the most unruffled temper, and the most perfect self-composure. And, surely, no occasion could ever have more justly called for a severe censure, than the ascribing disorders, the most afflicting to the sons of men, to such a cause. If this was not criminality in the highest degree, what, upon earth, can deserve the name of criminality?

It is only necessary to observe farther, both with respect to the message of John the Baptist, and to the cavils of these unprincipled and profligate Pharisees, that our Lord urged the miracles which he wrought as proofs, that he was *the Messiah*. And his reasoning upon the latter occasion was so forcible, that they appear to have been utterly unable to make any reply to it. And yet some of our modern, easy-faith'd Christians, are disposed to think, and to assert, that Christianity requires in proof, neither prophecies nor miracles,—though he frequently urged *both*, for this purpose, and particularly the latter. *If I had not done among them the works which no man ever did—they had not had sin.* When this shall become the publick opinion—the total dereliction of Christianity cannot be very far distant!

The Reader's attention is now requested to a most interesting and important conversation, between Jesus and his Disciples, respecting *the opinion* which was entertained, by the Jews, concerning *the nature of his character*, and, it is thus introduced, by the Evangelical Historian. Matt. xvi. 13. *When Jesus came into the coasts of Cesarea Philippi*—or into the country, which was under the Jurisdiction of Philip; *he asked his Disciples*, what was the public opinion concerning him? *Whom do men say that I the Son of Man am?* To this question, the reply of the Disciples was, v. 14. *Some say that thou art John the Baptist—some Elias—and others Jeremiah—or one of the Prophets.* From this account of the public opinion; it appears, that however varied their conjectures concerning him were, all were agreed that he was, *an extraordinary personage.* Our Lord then asked them, what was their own opinion of *the nature of his character*—or who *they*

thought

thought him to be? to which question, the Apostle Peter, without hesitation, replied—*Thou art* ὁ Χριστος the *Christ* —or *the Messiah*—*the Son of the living God!* *

* It is observed by Dr. G. Campbell that, " if we were to judge by the " common versions, or even by most versions into modern tongues we " should consider the word *Christ*, rather as a *a proper name*, than an " appellative, or name of office; and should think of it, only as a *surname* " given to our Lord. Our translators have contributed greatly to this " mistake, by very seldom prefixing the article before *Christ*, though " it is rarely wanted in the original. The word *Christ* was, at first, as " much an appellative, as the word *Baptist* was, and the one was as regularly " accompanied with the article, as the other. Yet our translators, who " always say, the *Baptist* have, one would think studiously avoided saying, " *the Christ*. This must appear to superficial Readers, an inconsiderable " difference; but the addition of the article will be found, when attended " to, of real consequence for conveying the meaning in English, with the " same perspicuity and propriety with which it is conveyed in the Greek. " So much virtue there is in the article which, in our Idiom, is never " prefixed to the name of a man, though it is invariably prefixed to a name " of office, unless where some pronoun, or other appropriate expression " renders it unnecessary; that without it, the sense is always darkened, and " sometimes marred. Thus, in such expressions as these; *This Jesus whom " I preach unto you is Christ.—Paul testified to the Jews that Jesus was " Christ.—Shewing that Jesus was Christ.*—The unlearned Reader, forms " no distinct apprehension, as the common application of the word leads " him, uniformly, to consider *Jesus* and *Christ* as no other than the name " and surname of the same person. It would have conveyed to such a " Reader precisely the same meaning to have said, *Paul testified to the Jews " that Christ was Jesus*, and so of the rest. The article alone, therefore, " in such cases, adds considerable light to the expression; yet no more " than what the words of the Historian manifestly convey to every Reader, " who understands his language.

" But it may be asked,—Is the word *Christ* never to be understood in " the New Testament as a proper name, but always as having a direct " reference to the office or dignity? I answer, that without question, " this word, though originally an appellative, came at length, from the " frequency of application to one individual, and only to one, to supply " the place of a proper name. What would contribute to hasten this effect " was, the commonness of the name *Jesus*, among the Jews at that time; " which rendered an addition necessary for distinguishing the person. The " remark of Grotius is not without foundation, that in process of time, " the name of Jesus was very much dropped, and *Christ*, which had never " been used before as the proper name of any person, and was, for that " very reason, a better distinction, and was substituted for it; so that among " the heathen, our Lord came to be more known by the latter than " the former.

" But it is beyond a doubt, that the word was never applied to him as a " proper name, while he remained on this earth. It was at that time always " understood as the denomination of the dignity or office, to which some " believed him entitled; others disbelieved, and many doubted." See Campbell's Dissertation on the Name *Christ*.

The Reader has here before him an unequivocal proof that, till this period, the Disciples had not acknowledged Jesus to be *the Messiah*—and indeed, if the state of things, at the time when this Conversation took place, be attentively considered; it will appear that it required no small exercise of faith, in the integrity of the character of Jesus, to have made this noble confession; for there were *then* no signs, of the nature of those which they had affixed to *the character of the Messiah*; which could, at all, have led them to think, their favorite idea of *a worldly kingdom*, was about to be realized. And, it is particularly worthy of Notice, from their own account, of the sentiments of the people at large, that they were perfectly singular, in their opinion, upon this head; some saying, that he was *John the Baptist*—some that he was *Elias*—and others *Jeremiah*, or *one of the Prophets*—but none that he was *the Christ*, or the *Messiah*, but themselves. This has been thought extraordinary, and it has been considered as not easily to be accounted for, from the known and acknowledged sentiments, which they then held, concerning *the nature of the Messiah's character*; which, as has repeatedly been observed, were most certainly, not materially different, from those of the rest of their countrymen.

But, surely, there is nothing contrary to probability, in the supposition, that they might believe *Jesus* to be *the Messiah*, whom they expected, though he had not, *as yet*, given them, any of those distinguishing proofs of his sustaining that character; which they had, invariably, till this period, and even till after the resurrection of Jesus, affixed to it, and which they were, *then*, so anxiously looking for. They had heard him say, that *the kingdom of heaven*, or, of the Messiah, *was at hand*; and, in consequence of that declaration, they had joined him, upon *the supposition*, or at least, upon *the hope*, that he himself might be *the Messiah*. They had themselves received *a Commission* from him, to announce its *near approach*. They had seen him work numerous miracles; which, very fully evinced, that he was *an extraordinary personage*; and this, as has already been observed, was, from their own account, *the general opinion*; and, from an intimate acquaintance with him, they did not entertain the least doubt, of the perfect integrity of his personal character. If, to all this, it be added, that they had frequent opportunities of observing, the superior excellence and sublimity of his instructions;

instructions; which extorted, even from his enemies—from those who had been employed by the Jewish Rulers, to bring him before them, an acknowledgement that *never man spake like this man*;—his unaffected piety to God—his unexampled disinterestedness—and his generous benevolence and philanthropy; and, it will, in no respect, be found to be unnatural, or improbable, that they should, expressly, declare *their belief* that he sustained that character, though he had not yet given them any of the proofs, which they, in common with the rest of their countrymen, had uniformly considered as inseparable from it. Besides; it should farther be observed, that by their continuing to follow him, with such unshaken fortitude and perseverance, they pretty strongly declared *their expectation* that the time would, one day, come, when he would give them, the fullest satisfaction, that he was *the Messiah*, and perhaps, it would not be too much to say, that it is not to be accounted for, upon any other principle!

But, this premature declaration of St. Peter, as it has been termed, that Jesus was *the Messiah*, is perhaps, best accounted for, by our Lord himself, in the remarkable eulogium, which St. Peter's noble confession drew from him, and fully justifies the supposition which has just been made; that the excellent instructions which he had given them, and the wonderful works which he had wrought, in the name of his Father, and of which they had been the constant witnesses, had drawn it from him. *Blessed art thou Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee—but my Father who is in Heaven,** As if he had said—" had you consulted flesh " and

* Closely connected with this are the declarations of our Lord to St. Peter, upon which the Church of Rome hath built her extravagant claims to supremacy, &c. v. 18, 19. *And I say also unto thee, that thou art Peter, and upon this Rock, I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it: And I will give unto thee the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven,* But here it ought to be particularly observed, that our Lord promised the same power to the other Apostles, and it is particularly worthy of notice, that it is introduced by a question, the answer to which totally excludes all ideas of pre-eminence. Chap. xviii. 1. *The Disciples came unto Jesus, saying,—Who is,* or rather, who shall be, *the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?* Upon this it is said, v. 2. *And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them, and said, verily I say unto you, except ye be converted,* or changed, from your present ambitious turn of mind,

"and blood only—your worldly prejudices and secular "views, with respect to THE NATURE *of the Messiah's Cha-* "*racter*—you would never, under the present circumstances "and appearances of things, have made the acknowledgment, "which you have now done; but the doctrines which I "have taught you, and the miracles which I have performed, "in the name, and by the authority of my Father, have, "upon this occasion, plainly influenced your judgment, "contrary to all human appearances, and extorted from you, "a confession, which no other consideration could have "have induced you to have made." Indeed; it is hardly possible to suppose that the Disciples of Jesus, upon the supposition that they were men of honesty and integrity, could have avoided giving Jesus a considerable degree of credit, even upon their own principles, especially after they

mind, *and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.—Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven.* Is there any thing here which has the most distant appearance of pre-eminence one above another? But that all-exclusive claim of St. Peter to pre-eminence might be entirely done away, our Lord, in this chapter, uses almost the same words of the Disciples, *generally*, as he does of Peter. V. 18. *Verily I say unto you, whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.* "All the pre-eminence therefore," to use the words of Dr. Benson, "which St. Peter had, in this respect was, "that having THE KEYS of the kingdom of heaven, he first opened the door "of faith, or first admitted both *Jews* and *Gentiles* into the Christian "*church*; and according to the terms, which he, as well as the other "*Apostles*, was commissioned to preach, upon earth, shall every Man's "state be finally and judicially determined, by Almighty God, in heaven. "But neither of these images, of his being called *a Rock*, or of his having *the* "*keys of the kingdom of heaven*, imply authority, power, or dominion; though "they imply the honor done that great Apostle, in his being chosen first "to lay the foundation of the Christian Church, or first to open the door of "faith, and admit both *Jews* and *Gentiles* into Christ's church, or kingdom. "But though this was an honor to him, he cannot, in this particular, have "any successor. One only could begin this great work—One only could "be the first in it, and that was the honor and pre-eminence of the Apostle "Peter.

"So far was St. *Peter* from being *the head and founder of the Roman* "*hierarchy*, that he himself never laid claim to that extravagant dominion, "which the *Bishops of Rome* have usurped; nor ever once aimed at enforcing "Religion with temporal and civil sanctions. So that if they could make "out their title, to the being his peculiar successors, (which they never have "done, nor ever will be able to do), yet their very foundation fails. And "that Apostle, under whom they claim, never had, nor pretended to have, "that authority and dominion, which they, as his successors, have most "unjustly and tyranically usurped." See Benson 1 Peter, i. 1.

had

had such opportunities of making their observations, upon his general character, that he would, at a proper time, give them *the necessary proofs*, that he actually did sustain *the character of the Messiah*. And that they did, in fact, give him that credit, and that their present declaration, that he was *the Messiah*, was founded upon it, seems to require no other proof, than the questions which they put to him, at a period, considerably subsequent to this; for, just before his crucifixion, and notwithstanding his prediction of *the total ruin of their country*, they asked him *what would be the sign of* HIS COMING? and even after his resurrection from the dead, they again asked him, in terms, which were free from all ambiguity, *when he would restore the Kingdom to Israel?*

This remarkable confession of St. Peter, was so contrary to all present appearances and to the general ideas, which then prevailed amongst the Jews, concerning *the nature of the Messiah's Character*, that it was, evidently, absolutely necessary that the Disciples should not be suffered to make it public. Our Lord, whose prudent attention to the circumstances of things, appears never, for a moment, to have forsaken him; foreseeing *the injurious consequences*, to the great object of his mission, of such a premature and public avowal, that he was *the Messiah*, thought it proper, upon the same principle, and for the same reasons, which had influenced his own conduct, to give his Disciples, upon this occasion, a strict injunction, not to tell any one that he was *the Messiah*. v. 20. *Then charged he his Disciples that they should tell no man that he was* THE CHRIST—or the Messiah. This caution, it has just been observed, was perfectly agreeable to our Lord's general conduct, as well as to his admirable and important precept, to *be wise as Serpents and harmless as Doves*. And it was, for this most obvious reason, absolutely necessary; because, if once such an opinion should be disseminated amongst the great body of the people, by his Disciples—by those who were known to be, upon the most intimate footing with him; it might not only have created *popular tumults and insurrections*, in his favor; which he, at all times, appears, most carefully to have avoided—but it might, and in all human probability, it would have, entirely, defeated the great and important purposes of his mission. The Author of Christianity, not founded on argument, in his peculiar and insidious manner, has dwelt much upon this

this prohibition of our Lord—but this appears to be so satisfactory a reason for the injunction of silence upon his Disciples, that even Infidelity itself, must be obliged to acknowledge its force. In short, this prohibition, is *a genuine and authentic evidence of the truth of the History*, and had it been wanting; it might have been justly suspected, as deficient in evidence; for it was, upon no account, *safe or proper*, under existing circumstances, to have divulged the opinion that he was *the Messiah*.*

But, our Lord did not stop here. He not only thought it absolutely necessary to charge his Disciples *to tell no one that he was* THE MESSIAH—but as he had, by his decided approbation of St. Peter's confession, plainly acknowledged that he, actually, did sustain that character; he clearly foresaw, the

* It was, upon the same principle, that our Lord refused to give those who required from him a sign from heaven, and "it has," as Dr. Gerard has observed, "particularly been alledged as a proof, that he was unwilling to "give all the evidence of his Mission, which he might have given, or to "satisfy the understandings of men."

"The Pharisees, it is said, *tempting him, asked a sign*; that is, some "testimonial of the truth of his declared mission; And what did this "request produce? Why, he sighed deeply at their perverseness, who were "so hard to be convinced, and stiled them a *foolish and adulterous generation*, "for their presumption. Now this desiring a rational evidence for their "discipleship, the seeking after a sign, as the Scripture terms it, had, if he "had indeed appealed to their understandings, been so far from any thing "criminal or blame-worthy, that it had been in all reason their indispensible "duty; whereas it was, it seems, in Faith, an unwarrantable, presumptuous, and wanton curiosity. *Christianity not founded on argument*; p. 38.

"The coming desirous to canvas the evidence, though from no other principle perhaps, originally, than that of gratifying a light curiosity, were, "one would imagine, a turn of mind to be favorably entertained, and "carefully cherished in a novice, by any who was solicitous to gain proselytes by such means, and conscious of having any thing of the kind to "produce to him But, on the contrary, we find our Master ever disclaiming, with the severest resentment, all followers of that complexion; and "no temper check'd and discouraged with so constant an aversion, as this "of, as it is opprobriously termed, *seeking a sign*." Ibid. p. 49.

To this objection Dr. Gerard replies, "That it almost refutes itself, though "we take not in, the peculiar nature of the sign which they demanded: "The assertion, that they asked only *some* testimonial of his declared "mission—that they desired a *rational* evidence of their discipleship—that "they came desirous to canvass the evidence—that this was the disposition "which Jesus held criminal, are all so directly contradictory to the real "circumstances in which the demand was made, that they can scarce be "imputed to other principles than want of candour, and an intention to "mislead: From these circumstances it is plain, that far from being pos-

"sessed

the farther necessity, of effectually checking, any propensity which they might have, to break through his injunction, and of repressing any *worldly and secular views*, which might *now*, with redoubled force, begin to operate upon the minds of the Disciples, with respect to their expectations of their beloved Master's *coming in that character*; for it must, most carefully be noted, that though they had acknowledged Jesus to be *the Messiah*—they still retained all their *worldly prejudices* concerning *the nature of his character*. It was therefore, most evidently, for the purpose of checking *their worldly views*, that he, with the most consummate wisdom, chose this opportunity of informing them, in a very particular and circumstantial manner, of the sufferings which he himself, in the course of his ministry, was to undergo. And nothing surely could have been more admirably adapted to the obtaining his purpose, than such a discovery. V. 21. *From that time forth*, says the Evangelist, i. e. from the time that St.

" sessed of this laudable temper, they were not impelled to make the " demand even by a principle so little blameable as *light curiosity*, but were " actuated by perverseness and prejudice, which had already made them " withstand the clearest evidence, and the greatest miracles, and which it " was in vain to expect to conquer by working more miracles. It was " therefore as reasonable to refuse to work more, as it is, not to persist in " reasoning with a man, who shows that he reasons only for the sake of " contention, without any concern to discover truth. But when we recollect " what was *the sign* which they desired, the objection is even absurd, it " was a sign which they were led to expect, only by their false notions of " *a temporal Messiah*; it was absolutely inconsistent with *the truth of the* " *Messiah's Character*; to have given it, would have been to become just " such a deliverer as the Jews expected: it was therefore impossible that " it could be given. Instead of giving it, it was proper to affirm expressly, " as Jesus did affirm, that it never would be given, and that it did not " belong to *the Messiah*, justly conceived. Whenever a sign was asked, " he appealed for the certainty of his Mission, to his own resurrection " from the dead. So far was he from refusing any rational evidence of his " mission, that even their perverseness hindered him not from voluntarily " pointing out the *strongest*. His resurrection was, in itself, the most " stupendous miracle; and its force was increased by its being in this " manner appealed to; for it thus became the accomplishment of prophecies " uttered by him. But there is a farther propriety in his foretelling it, " when they required a sign: it was a plain insinuation, that their opinion " of the manner of the *Messiah's* appearance was wrong—that he was not " such a prince as they expected: for by it he informed them expressly, " that he must be put to death, before he entered on his kingdom. His " answer was, therefore, fit for leading them to a juster interpretation of " Daniel's Prophecy, and for preventing their rejecting *the Messiah* because " he wanted a character which was never predicted of him." See Gerard's Dissertations, p. 186, &c.

Peter had made this noble confession that he was *the Messiah* —or rather from the time when he charged them *to tell no man that he was* THE MESSIAH, *began Jesus to shew to his Disciples, how that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things, from the Elders and Chief Priests and Scribes, and be killed and raised again the third day.*

When our Lord, as hath already been noticed at large, in the examination of the tenth chapter of this Evangelist, had forewarned his Disciples, of the great troubles, to which they would be exposed, in the execution of their commission, to announce the glad tidings of *the near approach of the Messiah's kingdom*—there is not the slightest intimation, of their having expostulated with him upon the subject, though he, at the same time, particularly informed them, that they were such as awaited himself—and, for this reason probably, that they could not, even upon their own principles, have expected that the great purposes of *the Messiahship*, could be completely attained, without both themselves and their beloved Master, being exposed to *some* difficulties. But, no sooner did Jesus enter into farther particulars, and foretel, in the closest connection, with an acknowledgement made by themselves, and with Jesus's decided approbation of that acknowledgment, that he was *the Messiah*—that such sufferings awaited him, as would terminate in a violent and ignominious death, and that, from the hands of his own countrymen—from *the Elders—the Chief Priests—and the Scribes*, whom they had been accustomed to look up to with, almost a superstitious reverence, than they immediately took the alarm. And, well they might; for sufferings like these, and from such a quarter too, were so totally incompatible, with all the ideas which they had previously affixed to *the Character of the Messiah*, that they could, no longer, keep silence. Indeed, if they had, *the Gospel History*, would have wanted one most essential and important internal evidence of *its genuine authenticity*; for nothing, it must be allowed by every one, who considers the matter impartially, can be more satisfactory to the human mind, than to find the conduct of the Disciples in perfect unison with the sentiments which they are, on all hands, admitted to have possessed! And, such was the fact, upon this truly interesting and important occasion; for the Evangelist relates that St. Peter, who seems, *generally*, to have been the most forward, in expressing his attachment to his

his beloved Master, *took him and began to rebuke him saying—be it far from thee Lord—this shall not be unto thee!* Nor have the Evangelical Historians failed to mark, with peculiar emphasis and energy, the extreme astonishment of the Disciples, at this deeply affecting, and to them, at that period, more especially, most unwelcome intelligence; for, in the next chapter, upon the same subject being renewed, St. Matthew says, v. 25. *they were filled with extreme grief at the news;* for so the original word properly signifies. St. Mark's expression is, if possible, still more forcible, chap. ix. 32. for it, very strongly expresses, the extreme perplexity into which they were thrown, in consequence of this prediction,—*They knew not what to make of the matter.* And St. Luke has, precisely, the same sentiment with St. Mark, with this very expressive and remarkable addition, that it was *hid from them*—or so wrapt up in darkness and mystery, that they could not tell what it could mean; i. e. their prejudices concerning *the nature of the Messiah's Character*, plainly prevented them from comprehending, how such a prediction could possibly be compatible with his being *the Messiah.*

The evidence that *the prejudices* of the Disciples of Jesus, were *the real causes*, of their extreme astonishment at his prediction, and indeed, from the very nature of things, could not but be so; it would be utterly impossible for any one, who reflects with impartial attention upon the circumstances of the case, to entertain a doubt of, even if our Lord had not *himself* particularly pointed it out—but, his reply to Peter's exclamation, that no such sufferings, as he had predicted, should befal him, renders it absolutely decisive. Chapter xvi. 23. *Get thee behind me Satan—for thou art an offence*—or rather as Bishop Pearce has translated and paraphrased it—"an adversary unto me, in throwing difficulties in my way, "by urging the motive of self-preservation against my going "on, with what I am to accomplish"—*for thou savorest not the things of God*—or spiritual things, *but the things of men*—or temporal things; most evidently alluding, in this latter expression, to their expectation that *the Messiah* should be *a temporal Prince*, and in the former to THE REAL NATURE *of the Messiah's Kingdom.* St. Luke likewise gives, a very strong, and, as it should seem, an unequivocal proof that *prejudice* was, *the real cause*, of their not understanding our Lord; for, upon his saying, as has already been noticed, that

they understood not this saying—or this prediction, concerning his death—that *it was hid from them*, and that *they perceived it not*—he adds, in the verse immediately following, that THEN *there arose, a reasoning among themselves, which of them should be greatest*, i. e. which of them should fill the most exalted stations, in *the kingdom of the Messiah*; which is a demonstrable proof, not only that they did not understand his prediction, but likewise, that they did not even imagine, that it would at all take place. A like contention is recorded, by the same Evangelist, upon another occasion, near the close of our Lord's life.—Chap. xxii. 24. *There was also*, says he, *a strife among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest in the kingdom of Heaven*—or of *the Messiah*; nor is it, a little remarkable, that this contention is mentioned, in the closest connection, with our Lord's prediction, that one of their own number, should betray him; and it is not unlikely, that this plan of treachery, was conceived, at this very meeting, and, probably, arose from disappointed ambition. * But, however this may be—all these circumstances must be admitted, as authentic and unequivocal evidences of *the truth of the History*, presenting to the mind of the judicious and intelligent Reader, as fair a claim to credit as any History, antient or modern can possibly produce!

It being then, indisputably evident, from our Lord's own account, that his Disciples were chiefly influenced, by views of *worldly ambition*, when they so strongly remonstrated with him, upon the subject of the sufferings which he had predicted

* A similar contention is mentioned in Matt. xviii. 1. and it appears to have been occasioned by our Lord's working a miracle to satisfy the demand of the gatherers of the Tribute-money; for it is said, in the verse immediately following that relation---*At that time came the Disciples unto Jesus, saying---who is*, or rather who shall be, *the greatest in the kingdom of Heaven?* It seems as if this exertion of the power of Jesus had fired their imagination with the prospect of the splendid scenes which they should enjoy, when the time came, that he should declare himself as *the Messiah*; having in this instance, as well as in many others, shewn that he had all nature at is command! Who can refrain from admiring the reply which our Lord, upon this occasion made to their question? *And Jesus called unto him a little child and set him before them and said---verily I say unto you---except ye be converted*; i. e. as Bishop Pearce appears, very properly, to have expressed it, "except ye be "changed from this state of pride and ambition and become as little "children"---*ye shall not enter into the kingdom of Heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself, as this little child---the same is the greatest in the kingdom of Heaven.*

to

to them, he should have to undergo—what line of conduct was it natural for him, upon such an occasion, to pursue? What line of conduct did he actually pursue? Why, precisely that which he had, with so much firmness and intrepidity, already pursued, when he gave them their commission to preach the glad tidings of the *near approach of the Messiah's Kingdom;* for, as, in that instance he did not shun to declare to them, what sufferings they would have to encounter, in the faithful discharge of the duties of their commission—so he said here, v. 24. *if any man will come after me*, i. e. if he will be my Disciple—*let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.* As if he had said; "the troubles and "sufferings, which I have told you, are coming upon me, "have given you great offence, as opposing your views of "worldly prosperity, in your expectations of *the coming of* "*the Messiah*—but I now tell you, again, that, if you follow "me with fidelity—you must deny yourselves, by giving up "those worldly gratifications, which have obtained such a "strong ascendancy in your minds, and you must take up "your cross, as I do mine, and must expect to meet with "*the same*, or similar sufferings, in the faithful discharge of "your duty." He then adds, nearly in the same language which he had used in chap. x. 25. *whosoever will save his life*, by meanly shrinking from his duty, on account of any such sufferings, *shall lose it; and whosoever shall lose his life, for my sake, shall find it!* In the two following verses—the superior advantages of preferring duty to interest, however extensive, are set, in the strongest light, which it is in the power of language to convey; for says our Lord—*what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul—or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?** No equivalent for it, can be found, in the whole universe of God. He then concludes the argument, by telling them, that their conduct, in the discharge of their duty would be the subject of *a future reckoning;* for, says he, v. 27. *the Son of*

* It seems to be not improbable that our Lord here alludes to the sentiments which were universally entertained by the Jews that their *Messiah's* Empire would be extended over *the whole world.* Now, says our Lord, should your utmost wishes be gratified, what will the obtaining them profit you, if you lose your own soul? This reference to the sentiments of the Disciples gives an additional beauty and force to our Lord's language. And such references appear to be particularly deserving of notice, as they add to the evidence of the authenticity of the History.

Man

Man shall come in the glory of his Father, with his Angels, and then he shall reward every man according to his works.

Nothing can be more evident to an attentive Reader, than that *the Disciples of Jesus*, are here directed to *a state of happiness, in a future world*, as the reward of any sufferings, to which they might be exposed, in consequence of their faithful adherence to him, as *the Messiah*, as infinitely more worthy of their regard, than any acquisitions, however splendid and extensive, of a merely worldly nature. No reasoning can be imagined more closely connected—or better calculated to enforce his injunction, of not making him known under *the Character of the Messiah* and of directing their views to *the spiritual Nature of his Kingdom*, than the whole of this discourse. None could possibly have been better fitted to reconcile them to the troubles, which they might have to encounter, in consequence of their attachment to him; for it shewed them, in the strongest manner, his own determined contempt of danger, even though it should terminate in the loss of his life, under circumstances the most degrading, which can be imagined—and consequently, it must have had, a powerful tendency, to fortify their own minds, to meet the calamities, which they might have to share, in common with him. No reasoning could possibly have been more just, in every possible case, which might happen, than what he had formerly, and upon a similar occasion, made use of—*that the Disciple was not above his Master—nor the Servant above his Lord, and that it was enough for the Disciple to be as his Master*—or upon *the same footing* with him. In a word—nothing could have been more admirably calculated to answer all the purposes, which the peculiar circumstances of things, at the time, required, than the whole of this reasoning of our Lord!

Had his address to his disciples, upon this occasion, ended here,—all would have been perfectly clear and intelligible, to the plainest understanding,—but however much to the purpose, it might have been, to fortify their minds against any sufferings which might happen, to him, or to them—yet it was not, of itself, sufficient to satisfy them, of what they most wanted to be informed,—and, more particularly, after so remarkable a prediction of his own death, and that by the hands of his own countrymen. They knew perfectly well that *the Messiah* was not *yet come* in their sense of *his coming*, and they still continued to expect *his coming*, with all the

eagerness,

eagerness, and, at the same time, with all *the prejudices* of the rest of their countrymen. Whatever difficulties, therefore, they might have to account for events, so foreign to their expectations, as Jesus had been telling them, would certainly take place, and however they might be perplexed to solve those difficulties; yet they could not, and it is abundantly evident, from the whole tenor of *the Gospel History*, that they, *in fact*, did not, notwithstanding these predictions, renounce their hopes of *his coming in that character*. They had, as hath been seen, in this very discourse, declared that Jesus was THE MESSIAH—*the Son of the living God*, and he had, in his turn, in the most unequivocal terms, expressed his entire approbation of that declaration. Troubles and difficulties, in the accomplishment of the great purposes of *his coming*, as *the Messiah* were, most certainly, as hath been observed, not incompatible, even upon their own principles, with that character; though they certainly had not, till he had told them, any idea of such, as would terminate in *his death*. Yet still, amidst such grating predictions; it was absolutely necessary to support their expectations of *his coming*, and to interweave, with them, the most unequivocal assurances, that these expectations would, finally, be realized. Such an assurance, he had already given them, when he gave them *their commission*, as his Apostles; telling them that *that they should not have gone over the cities of Israel ere the Son of Man came*—and no one, it may be presumed, will dispute that, a similar assurance, was not, equally necessary, upon the present occasion. Accordingly, he sums up the whole, by the assurance of *his coming*—not as *the Judge of the World*—but as *the Messiah*, distinguishing it, from the *former coming*, by pointing out, *the particular time* WHEN *he should come*.—And this he does, in terms of the greatest solemnity and strength of language.—Ver. 28. *Verily I say unto you, there be some standing here who shall not taste of death till they see the Son of Man*—the Messiah, *coming in his Kingdom*.

No one who considers the subject with the attention which it deserves, can possibly doubt that *the coming*, mentioned in the 27th verse, is closely connected with our Saviour's reasoning, from the 23d verse; for the *losing of their life, and finding it* again, could not have had any other reference than to *a future state*. And the evidence that *the coming*, mentioned in the 28th verse, was connected with the conversation, which gave rise

to

to the subsequent discourse, appears to be no less clear; for, as has been observed, it was, at least, as essentially necessary to the confirmation of that faith, which they had, so nobly avowed, viz. that *Jesus* was THE MESSIAH, *the Son of the living God.*

Such appears to be *the connection* of the two Advents, and nothing, it may fairly be presumed, could possibly have prevented the perceiving this connection, but an inattention to *the double object* which Jesus had in view, in this address to his Disciples,—first, to inform them that the primary object of his mission, as *the Messiah*, had a reference to *a future state*, and that it was necessary to submit to such sufferings, as the faithful discharge of their mission, might bring upon them: and, secondly, to give them the satisfaction, which his prediction of his sufferings and death, had rendered absolutely necessary, that the time was near approaching when *the kingdom of God* should no longer be *at hand*—but actually *come*. In a word—a close and impartial attention to the whole of the reasoning of our Lord, and to all the circumstances of the case, cannot fail to satisfy the unprejudiced and impartial enquirer, that the last verse has, *an immediate and direct reference*—not to the verse immediately preceding—but to that subject and to that *only*, which was the occasion of the whole discourse, to wit—to *the Messiahship of Jesus*; the belief of which, they had explicitly avowed, and which they were in constant expectation of seeing realized. *

In the chapters which are parallel to this under consideration, there seems to be nothing which is particularly worthy of attention, but what tends, in the strongest manner, to confirm the sense, which has now been given, of *the nature of the two advents*:—In the 27th and 28th verses St. Matthew says, *There are some standing here who shall not taste of death, till they shall see the Son of Man*, the Messiah *coming in his Kingdom.* In St. Mark, our Lord's reasoning, and the occasion which gave rise to it, are *precisely* of the

* Bishop Pearce says, "the 27th verse is meant of *his coming* to visit and "punish the Jews, as in v. 25. See ch. xxiv. 30. xxvi. 64. and Daniel, vii. "13. and Rev. i. 7." It is for the judicious Reader to determine whether the sense here offered to his attention is not to be preferred. The learned University Preacher seems very properly to have observed that, "it confirms or "gives a reason for a discourse, and contains an expression which can be "applied only to the general Judgment." See Dr. Edwards's Sermon on the Predictions of the Apostles. p. 25.

same

same import; though the verse, which concludes the subject is, by a strange inattention, or misconception of the Translators, made to begin a new Chapter; which has, a natural and direct tendency, to mislead an ordinary Reader. Mark viii. 34. *Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me;* ver. 35. *For whosoever will save his life shall lose it—but whosoever will lose his life, for my sake and the Gospel's*, i. e. for the sake of the good news of THE COMING OF THE MESSIAH'S KINGDOM—*the same shall save it.* Ver. 36. *For what shall it profit a man, if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words; of him also shall the Son of Man be ashamed, when he cometh, in the glory of his Father, with the holy Angels.* Chap. ix. 1. *And he said unto them—Verily I say unto you there be some standing here, who shall not taste of death, till they have seen the Kingdom of God*—or, of the Messiah, *come with power.* St. Luke's account is as follows, Ch. ix. 23, &c. *And he said unto them all,—If any man come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me; for whosoever will save his life shall lose it; for what is a man advantaged, if he gain the whole world and lose himself, and be cast away? For whosoever shall be ashamed of me, and of my words; of him shall the Son of Man be ashamed when he shall come, in his own glory, and in his Father's, and of the holy Angels. But*—or nevertheless—*I tell you, of a truth, there be some standing here who shall not taste of death till they see the Kingdom of God.*

Here the judicious and attentive Reader is requested, particularly, to observe, that in all the three Evangelists, our Lord's meaning is, in substance, the same, and the occasion which gave rise to it, is so notoriously so, that there is no occasion to trouble him with a repetition of it. And, the very variations of the concluding verse, in each of the Evangelists, very strongly, confirm the sense, which has here been contended for. St. Matthew says, *That they should see the Son of Man coming in his Kingdom.* St. Mark, *That they should see the Kingdom of God come with power.* And St. Luke says simply, that *they should see the Kingdom of God.*

If this language of Jesus be understood of *the coming of the Messiah*,—or of *the Kingdom*, which he had announced to be *at hand*, and which it was the great object of his Mission,

and of the whole of *the Gospel History*, to prove—which the whole Jewish nation, the Disciples of Jesus themselves not excepted, were ardently expecting; which of course, it is hardly to be imagined—the question of the Disciples being considered, they could understand, in any other sense, all will be found to be perfectly natural and easy; and the singular propriety, and even the absolute necessity of it, will be immediately discerned and acknowledged. But if, *a second coming*, after the Ascension of Jesus, *to judge all Mankind*, and that, while some of those who heard him make use of this language, were still living, was intended, as the Historian of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, and the learned University Preacher, have supposed, how was it possible for the Disciples to understand him—or, how could they reconcile *the two Advents*, with each other?

It may, indeed, be said, that the Disciples did not always understand the meaning of Jesus, and it is very true, that, even in the case under consideration, they did not understand him. But their misunderstanding his meaning, in this case, is easily to be accounted for. They had no idea of *a suffering*, or at least, of *a crucified Messiah*, and therefore St. Peter, upon our Lord's prediction, that such a fate awaited him, very naturally expressed his disbelief of such a prediction, by immediately exclaiming—*Be it far from thee Lord—this shall not be unto thee.* But, the great question here is, whether, with the sentiments which the Disciples, confessedly and beyond all possibility of doubt, at this period entertained, they could possibly have imagined that the great purposes of *the Messiah's first coming*, were fully answered, before *that coming* had been acknowledged, by themselves, to have taken place? Could the Disciples of Jesus have understood him, as predicting *the end of the world*, in that generation, in the strict sense of that expression—there cannot exist, a shadow of a doubt, that they must have forsaken him, as *an Impostor*, as not answering, in the most essential and the most important respects, *the true characteristics of the Messiahship*; not only, according to their ideas of *the nature of the Messiah's character*—but according to every idea which can be formed of it. If *the coming*, mentioned in these passages of the several Evangelists, meant *his coming to judge the world, at the last day*—how, even in the estimation, and upon the principles of the Disciples

Disciples themselves, were the prophecies *of the establishment of the Messiah's Kingdom over all the Kingdoms of the earth*; which, it is not easy to imagine they should have overlooked, to be accomplished? Or, even if this can be supposed—how is the subsequent conduct of the Apostles to be accounted for, if they understood him in this sense, and particularly, their anxiety to know *when he would restore the Kingdom to Israel*, and their requiring from him *a sign of his coming*, when he predicted *the approaching destruction of Jerusalem*?

In every view, therefore, in which this subject can, fairly, be placed, especially if the Gospels be considered *as Histories*, and particularly *as Histories of the coming of the Messiah*, and of *Jesus's* sustaining that character,—the supposition that this was our Lord's genuine meaning, in these passages, is most preposterous and absurd, and is countenanced, by no one circumstance of probability or just reasoning; but is, on the contrary, contradicted by them all; for the connection and occasion of the discourse—the declaration of St. Peter, that *Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of the living God*; and *Jesus's* decided approbation of that declaration, followed by his predictions of his own sufferings and death, at which St. Peter was so much offended, naturally and necessarily led him to give them an assurance that, notwithstanding these events, so contrary to all their preconceived expectations—their hopes of *his coming in the character of the Messiah*, should not be disappointed, but that, on the contrary, some of those very persons who were then present *should not taste of death till they saw the Son of Man*—the Messiah, *coming in his Kingdom*. In one word; it may confidently be affirmed that, if the Historian of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire,—or his learned Advocate, the University Preacher, had considered these passages, in their connection, and in that historical point of view, in which they have now been presented to the Reader, and in which they, unquestionably, ought to be considered, they must have been so far from producing them, as objections to *the truth of Christianity*, that they would have appeared, as they really are, as *most genuine and unequivocal evidences*, in its favor.* It is a most excellent and

* Some Commentators have imagined that the 28th verse is connected with the transfiguration in the subsequent chapter—but to this opinion the learned University Preacher has observed, "it may be replied that it would

and judicious observation of the late Dr. Ogden, "That it is "not the mere sound of a word that we can rely upon, for "the knowledge of what the Scripture teacheth, in any case. "The nature of the subject—the light afforded from other "parts of Scripture—and from reason also, deserve all to be "attended to: So that the interpretation of a passage is "sometimes very different from that which may be first sug-"gested to an hasty, heedless Reader." * And, perhaps, there is not, in the Annals of Scripture Criticism, a more remarkable instance of the importance of this observation than that which has *now* been the subject of examination.

In the view which has been taken of the 10th chapter of this Evangelist; it was observed that the conduct of Jesus, upon the occasion of his giving them *a Commission* to announce *the approach of the Messiah's Kingdom*, was, at once, an unequivocal and exemplary proof, of the strict integrity of his own Character, and of his affectionate sensibility to the peculiar delicacy of the situation of the Disciples, in consequence of the strong prejudices which they had imbibed concerning *the nature of the Messiah's Kingdom*. And, the same remark may be made, upon the present occasion. He shun'd not tell them the fate to which he was devoted, in consequence of the faithful discharge of the duties of his office, though he well knew, how ungrateful such intelligence would be to them, and he again repeats to them, how necessary it was for them, faithfully, to adhere to him, whatever might be the consequence:—but that they might not be overwhelmed, by so gloomy a prospect, he informs them, for their encouragement, that *there were some then present, who should not taste of death till they saw the Son of Man*—the Messiah—*coming in his Kingdom*.

But it must here be particularly remarked, that the benevolence and humanity of the Character of Jesus and the superior wisdom which directed his conduct, are particularly distinguished and exemplary, in this very important respect—

"wear the appearance of trifling to predict with solemnity, that some of "the party then present should continue in existence, till they had seen an "event which was to happen in eight days." See the Theol. Repos. V. II. p. 124.

* Dr. Ogden's Sermons not being at hand—the Reader will excuse the not being able to refer to the particular place where this passage is to be found.

that

that the painful discoveries which he found it necessary to make to his Disciples, were *gradual* and as he found they were *able to bear them.* When he gave them their Commission to preach *the glad tidings of the Kingdom of Heaven*—or of *the Messiah* — he told them they must expect to meet with much ill treatment and run great hazards, in the execution of the duties of their office—he even went so far as to tell them that they should be *hated by all men for his name's sake*, and that he himself should not be exempted, from the like sufferings and a similar degree of hatred and contempt. But, it was not till they had been witnesses of the superior excellence of his instructions—till they had seen him perform the most numerous and astonishing miracles, which had ever been exhibited to the eyes of mankind—till they had formed a personal acquaintance with him, sufficient to engage their affections—till, in short, they were so fully satisfied of the perfect integrity of his Character, as even, to extort, from them, an explicit acknowledgment that they believed him to be *the Messiah—the Son of the living God*—it was not *till then*, that he ventured to give them any *explicit and direct information* that he was to be *the victim of Jewish malice*, and that, by their hands, he was to die upon a cross, *as a notorious Malefactor and Impostor.* How highly necessary this prudent and guarded conduct of Jesus was, is abundantly evident, from the extreme astonishment which they, *even then*, expressed, and from their utter inability to comprehend what he could possibly mean, by such a prediction. It may reasonably be presumed, therefore, that if it had been made sooner, it would have totally overwhelmed them with despair, and have induced them entirely to have forsaken him.

But, if this cautious and prudent conduct, was so necessary, upon these occasions—how much more so must it have been, in the discoveries which he had yet to make to them? Had he, at an early period, unfolded to them, the tremendous calamities which were approaching—*the ruin of their Temple —the entire destruction of their capital City—the subsequent dispersion and long captivity of their whole Nation*—their minds must have been too severely affected, by so *premature a discovery*, and it would have been difficult to imagine, how they could, in such circumstances, have received the unwelcome intelligence without, immediately, deserting him as *an Impostor.* Our Lord, therefore, well knowing, how extremely ungrateful,

ungrateful, *these awful predictions*, could not but have been to them; seems to have been induced, in the earlier part of his ministry, to have communicated them, by distant hints and obscure insinuations, and chiefly, by the aid of parable: and, it is highly probable, that he post-poned, a more full and explicit prediction, of these awful calamities; till towards the close of his life, that his Disciples might, by their own observations, be enabled, more accurately, to appreciate *the real Character of their Countrymen*, and particularly of *their Rulers*, and that thus, they might be, the more easily reconciled, to events; which were so entirely, contradictory to all their most sanguine expectations, and their most deep-rooted prejudices.

It seems to have been, with a particular view to prepare the minds of the Disciples, for these awful denuntiations, that our Lord, in the xxiiid. Chapter of St. Matthew, describes, at considerable length—*the flagitious Characters* of the Jewish Scribes and Pharisees, in which *the spiritual Tyranny—the injustice and the hypocrisy* of their conduct are delineated, with an unusual energy and boldness of language. Having, in the former part of this Chapter, in several striking instances, charged them, with the grossest depravity, he, in the 32d verse, foretells, that they would *fill up the measure of the Iniquities of their Fathers*, and thereby, render themselves *ripe for destruction*, and he particularly terms them, *Serpents and a generation of Vipers, who would not escape the damnation of Hell. Wherefore*, he adds v. 34. *Behold I send unto you Prophets and wise Men, and Scribes, and some of them ye shall kill and crucify, and some of them, shall ye scourge in your Synagogues and persecute from City to City, that upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the Earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias, son of Barachias whom ye slew between the Temple and the Altar.* V. 36. *Verily I say unto you—All these things shall come upon this generation.*

It was observed, in the early part of this work, that our Lord had manifested, an high regard for *the Jewish Nation*—that to excite them to improve the advantages which by the favor of providence, their situation afforded them, he had represented them, as *the Salt of the Earth* and *the Light of the World*, and had pointed out to them, in very expressive language, the dangerous consequences of neglecting to improve

prove those advantages, by telling them that *if the salt had lost it savor*—or its saltness, *it would become of no use—but fit only to be trodden under foot of Men.* And here, having seen that all his labors had been thrown away upon them, and that they had treated all his kind attention to their Interests, with neglect and contempt—he appears to have been, unusually affected, and breaks out, in the most pathetic language, on the view of their approaching fate. *O Jerusalem, Jerusalem—thou that killest the Prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee—How often would I have gathered thy Children together, as an Hen gathereth her Chickens under her wings, and ye would not. Behold your house is left unto you desolate!* *

There is, in the verse immediately following, a considerable degree of difficulty, which it seems, not easy, to solve—but it, perhaps, alludes to the anxiety with which, when calamity was coming upon them, they would, as Josephus says they actually did, express their most earnest wishes for *the appearance of their Messiah*, as their deliverer. They would then see that he who now claimed *the character of the Messiah*, had truly foretold their approaching ruin, instead of the appearance of *a Messiah*, who would effect their *temporal deliverance.* †

Having,

* It should appear that our Lord had his eye upon the beautiful language of the Apocryphal Esdras, in the whole of his discription, from the 34th verse: selecting what was most to his purpose, 2 Esdras i. 28. *Thus saith the Almighty Lord—Have I not prayed you, as a Father his Sons—as a Mother her Daughters, and a Nurse her young Babes, that ye would be my people and I should be your God—that ye would be my Children and I should be your Father? I gathered you together as a Hen gathereth her Chickens under her wings: But now what shall I do unto you, &c. your house is desolate.*

† Dr. Doddridge has observed that "if we might be allowed, with "Grotius, to translate the Greek words, *till ye would be glad to say, or wish* "*you had said*—Blessed is he that cometh, &c. this would give a very plain "and easy sense, nearly parralel to Matt. xxvi. 64. where the words here-"after is perhaps used in the same sense. And thus the words might be "explained, as if our Lord had said 'From the time of my present appear-"ance, at this Passover, you shall not see me any more, till that awful "hour of *Judgment*, in which I shall appear in such pomp and power, "that the proudest of you all shall have reason to wish you had cordially "joined in those *Hosannahs* which you lately rebuked.' This Interpre-"tation," says the Dr. "could the *Version* be justified, I should vastly "prefer to any other."

The learned Mr. Dillinger the translator of a very humble attempt to illustrate various passages of Scripture in some notes which he has subjoined says, "that these words are taken from Psalm cxviii. 26. and are nearly to the

"same

Having, in the manner above described, delineated *the Character* of the chief Rulers of the Jewish nation, and denounced the severest woes upon them, for their unparalleled atrocities—our Lord, in the following chapter, embraced the opportunity, which the occasion of his visiting the Temple, with his Disciples, afforded him, of renewing the awful subject, and of describing, more particularly, the calamities which were coming upon them. The Disciples, having drawn his attention, to the extraordinary magnificence of this celebrated building, which, for art and beauty, was esteemed the wonder of the world; he immediately told them, that the building which they so much, and so justly admired, would be so completely destroyed, that there would not be *one stone left upon another, which should not be thrown down.* *

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" same purpose with the preceeding verse — *O Lord help — Hosanna—O* " *Lord send us good speed. Praised be he who cometh in the name of the* " *Lord.* Who remembereth not here, the acclamation with which Jesus " was followed by the people and even by the Children, at his entrance into " Jerusalem? The words must have been very well known to the Jews; " for they were, with great solemnity sung as a part of the great Hallel, every " year, viz. at the feast of the Passover, of Pentecost and of the Tabernacle, " and in the same manner, at the feast of the Temple. Now says Jesus, who " well knew that he should be put to death, in a few days, and should not " openly appear after his Resurrection---*Ye shall see me no more until ye* " *shall say—Praised be he who cometh in the name of the Lord!* Must " they not then have thought of their feasts, on which they were accustomed " to use these words? And was it not *a hint* that he would manifest him- " self to them on one of their Feasts? The sad consequences have taught " us that thereby—the Feast of the Passover was meant." See Wetstein Rev. Test. Matt. xxiii. 37-39.

* " On the days immediately preceding the Crucifixion," says Mr. Richards, in his admirable Sermons, at Bampton's Lectures, " our blessed " Lord disclosed, with clearness and accuracy which nearly resemble the " detail of the Historian, many of the most memorable circumstances, " with which the siege of Jerusalem would be attended. The astonishing " foresight, which he manifested by describing the signs—the manner and " the exact time of the destruction of the holy City must, if maturely consi- " dered, overpower the mind of the Christian, with wonder and conviction. " But the circumstance, which perhaps most effectually raises this prediction " above all supiscion of its being the result of human sagacity, is the entire " destruction which it represents, as awaiting the vast edifice of the Temple. " Before this generation pass away, said the holy founder of Christianity, " when he beheld the magnificent Pile, not one stone shall be left upon " another. Even, if we suppose, what must only be supposed for argument's " sake, that the conquest of Jerusalem could be conjectured, from the pre- " vailing spirit and circumstances of the times; yet the total destruction of " the Temple, was not the necessary, or even the probable consequence of

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The surprise and astonishment which this prediction produced, upon the minds of the Disciples, who entertained the most splendid ideas, of the prosperity of their nation, under the reign of their Messiah, may easily be conceived; and it is represented in a very natural and lively manner, by the questions which, upon this occasion, they immediately put to our Lord. So contrary was this prediction, to every idea which, *as Jews*, they had been accustomed to entertain, that they could not help exclaiming,—*When shall these things be?* and, if they must be; for that, as hath already been noticed, is the ellipsis, to be supplied—*what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world*—or age?

If a careful attention had been paid by Critics and Commentators to the circumstances and situation of the Disciples, at the period when this conversation arose, and particularly, to the sentiments which they *then* held, concerning *the nature of*

" such a calamitous event. Its preservation would rather have been the " theme of a sagacious pretender to Prophecy. I will not here insist upon " the strength of this fortress, both natural and artificial, which the Jewish " Historian has represented, as one of the most impregnable which had ever " been erected in the World. Even the Conqueror, surveying it in Ruins, " and discovering that it could not, if skilfully defended, have been shaken, " by military engines—nor stormed by the most intrepid hosts, acknow- " ledged the absolute incompetence of human instruments, and ascribed " its demolition to the manifest interference of God. Independently of " these considerations; it must have been evident, in the age of our " Saviour, that whatever might be the fate of the City and of its inhabitants, " in consequence of the stubborn hostility of the Jews and the inveterate fury " of the Romans; it would be the common object, both of the Victors and " the Vanquished, to save this venerable building from destruction.

" The Jews, trusting in their mistaken interpretation of the antient Pro- " phets, considered their Temple placed under the immediate protection of " the Almighty, as secure from mortal violence, and immoveable as the " ground on which it stood. So infatuated were they, by this blind confi- " dence, that when their City was given up for plunder to the Legions, they " rushed, secure of safety, into the burning Ailes of the Sanctuary, and thou- " sands perished in the Ruins.

" If we examine the Annals of the Romans, we shall discover, that " during the period of their grandeur and prosperity, which long preceded " the fall of Jerusalem, when the spirit of Rivalship no longer prevailed, " which in the earlier ages of the Republic had occasioned the destruction of " Corinth, Carthage, and Numantia; it was the custom of that great people, " to preserve intire, the stupendous monuments of their victories. The " chief Cities of the conquered Kingdoms were permitted to flourish as " tributaries of Rome. The works of elegant art alone, with which they " were inriched, were carried away, to grace the triumph of the General and

of the Messiah's Kingdom; it would have been impossible to have mistaken their meaning, when they said to Jesus, *what shall be the sign of thy coming?* But, it hath, most unfortunately happened, from not attending to these circumstances, that this, and the parallel chapters of Mark and Luke, in which, the prediction of *the destruction of Jerusalem*, is recorded, have much divided the opinions of Divines, and furnished too much reason, for the objection of the Historian of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, and of the learned University Preacher.

The difficulties attending the subject of these chapters, are very ably stated, by the latter of these Writers, in the following terms:—Speaking of the xxivth Chapter of St. Matthew, he says, "It is a chapter in which a Prophecy of the Destruction of Jerusalem is entangled with, an apparent or real prediction, of the approaching dissolution of the world." And he very justly says that, "The various and opposite methods which Theologians have adopted to remove

"adorn the Capital of the Empire. Thus Alexandria, the Emporium of "Egypt, Athens, the seat of science; and the splendid and opulent Cities "of Asia Minor, continued entire, after their subjugation and contributed "to the glory and prosperity of their Conquerors. *In addition to the above* "argument, let it be remembered, as another strong reason, for the probable "preservation of the Temple, that it was the uniform policy of the Romans "to respect the religious prejudices of the conquered countries. So accommodating was their maxims of universal toleration, that within the regions "of Palestine, in compliance with the wishes of its inhabitants, they even "lowered their Imperial Eagles and desisted from their design of erecting "the statue of the Emperor, in the sanctuary of Jehovah. So powerful was "the influence of this principle among their Commanders, at the period of "which we are speaking, that the illustrious *Chief*, who conducted the "siege of Jerusalem, manifested a most ardent anxiety for the preservation "of the Temple. At the commencement of his military operations, he "repeatedly solicited the Jews to save the magnificent building; and "again, at the storming of the City, when a brand had been thrown within "the Pile, by the hand of a Soldier, he instantly commanded his Legions to "extinguish the flames. It was natural, therefore, to suppose, that even "under the most extraordinary and desperate circumstances, they would be "induced, in conformity with their usual principles of toleration, to pre"serve the Temple of Jerusalem.

"From these considerations, it must necessarily be inferred that to a Jew, "during the reign of Tiberius, the demolition of that sacred Edifice, must "have appeared absolutely impossible: and, even if its possibility had "been admitted, that its demolition by a Roman Army, must have appeared "singularly improbable, as that people seemed to be engaged, by the strongest "motives to favour its preservation." See Richards's Bampton Lectures, "pages 91—6.

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" an objection, which is too obvious to be overlooked, form, " it must be confessed, a very considerable presumption that " an adequate solution of the difficulty has not hitherto " been discovered, and that the objection, is founded on the " basis of truth." In confirmation of this opinion, he farther adds that, " Some interpreters imagine that the Pro- " phecy relates, entirely to the ruin of the Jewish nation: " Others, by the convenient introduction of types and double " senses, preserve in it, a reference throughout to *the con-* " *summation of all things*:—Some have contended that it " partly belongs to the former and partly to the latter; but " what portions of it, are applicable to the one, and what to " the other, they cannot ascertain;—while a few have ven- " tured to assert that it represents the final Judgment, " as immediately subsequent to the Jewish Calamities." See Edwards's Sermon on the Predictions of the Apostles, pages 18, 19.

Mr. Kett, the learned and ingenious Author of, a well timed, and interesting publication, entitled,—*History the Interpreter of Prophecy*, is of opinion, that the enquiry of the Disciples related to three different Events; for having quoted St. Mark's account, he says, " The parallel passages " of Matthew and Luke plainly indicate that this enquiry " respected the destruction of Jerusalem—the second coming " of our Lord, and the end of the world; events which," says he, " they possibly expected would happen together, and " to which the reply of our Lord evidently refers." Vol. I. page 199.

Mr. King, the pious, but eccentric Author, of Morsels of Criticism, appears to have conceived, that the chapter relates to all the three Events; for he says, " First, we find our " Lord gives a general Answer, which applies equally to all " three Events. Then he gives a particular answer to the " first question; and lastly, as particular an answer to the " second; and after that, he assumes the general consideration " of the sudden manner in which every one of these tremen- " dous events were to come to pass; and concludes with ad- " monitions." See page 252.

Dr. Priestly, in his Fast Sermon, February 28, 1794, says, " To me it appears, not improbable, that several circumstances, " in our Saviour's Prophecy, concerning the destruction of " Jerusalem, and the desolation of Judea, relate to this great

" and more distant period," (i. e. to the restoration of the " Jews), " for it was delivered in answer to a question put to " him by his Disciples, which respected both the events, on " the idea of their being co-incident." See pages 14, 16.

But, perhaps, there is no instance, in the annals of the Christian world, of the difficulties in which learned men have been involved, in the consideration of the meaning of our Lord's prediction, more remarkable than that of Mr. Houghton, the ingenious Author of two Sermons upon this subject; for, having pointed out, what he conceives to be differences, in the accounts of the Evangelists, he says, " From these dif- " ferences among the Evangelists, it is evident that they " spoke of *the destruction of Jerusalem*, and of *the end of the* " *World*, promiscuously, and consequently that they con- " sidered these two Advents, as one and the same." Again he says, " Mark and Luke, while evidently discoursing of " the calamities of the Jews, seem to rise, by a sudden tran- " sition, from the period of the Jewish state to that of the " world itself, and describe the coming of our Saviour, in " terms nearly similar, and equally sublime, with those of " Matthew; yet all, with one consent, refer the the whole " to that present generation." See pages 225, 226.

While the most zealous and able advocates of Christianity consider these chapters in such a light; it is impossible for any one to be surprized, that it should be inferred that the objection of the Historian of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, so often mentioned, is founded on the basis of truth. It is equally impossible not to perceive the absolute necessity of re-examining, with a critical and minute attention, the true meaning of these chapters, and of endeavouring to rescue them, from the charge of obscurity, at least, if not of predicting what the records of more than seventeen Centuries, have proved to be false.

Upon predicting the entire destruction of the magnificent Temple at Jerusalem—the surprize and astonishment of the Disciples is sufficiently indicated, by the questions which they put to Jesus, and if regard had been paid to the whole tenor of the Gospel history; it could not have been doubted, that that surprize and astonishment arose, from their not being able to comprehend how their expectation of *the coming of the Messiah was to be realized.* Jesus had, already, told them, that *they should not have gone over the Cities of Israel*

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ere the Son of Man the Messiah *came*, and that *there were some among them who should not taste of death till they saw the Son of Man* the Messiah *coming in his Kingdom.* And now he tells them of a most awful event which could never have entered into their minds to be compatible with *the coming of the Messiah*, to wit, that *Jerusalem should be totally destroyed.* In these circumstances—was it possible for them, upon the common principles of human nature, to have refrained from asking, as they did—*what shall be the sign of thy coming*, with a particular reference to *the coming* of Jesus as *the Messiah?* If they had not asked this question, would not this part of *the Gospel History*, have been *essentially defective*, from the Disciples not having acted as men, in their circumstances, would have been compelled to have done? for, it must be observed, that there does not appear to be, any thing, in the preceeding part of the History, which can lead to the slightest suspicion, either that their sentiments, were, at all, altered, upon the subject—or that they had *yet* attained the satisfaction, which they wished for, that Jesus had *yet* appeared in that Character! Upon the contrary—their subsequent enquiry—*when he would restore the Kingdom to Israel*, and the declaration that some of them, after the death of Jesus, actually made—that *they trusted it had been he who should have redeemed Israel*, are, if any thing can be, *demonstrations*, that, at this period, they *still expected* that he would declare himself, as *the Messiah.*

In the present instance, however, there is no necessity for such reasoning as this; for *the internal evidence*, arising from the answer of our Lord, to the questions of the Disciples is, of itself, fully sufficient to establish, this important proof, of *the genuine authenticity*, of this part of the History. Deeply sensible of the effect which so terrible a denuntiation upon every thing which, *as Jews*, they held most dear upon Earth, must necessarily have had, upon their minds; and thoroughly satisfied, from the circumstances of the case, as well as from the nature of their Questions, what lay nearest to their hearts, to wit, the expectation of *his coming as the Messiah*, and their extreme anxiety to have this awful prediction reconciled with those expectations—his benevolent attention, to the peculiarity of their situation, led him to make it, his *first and principal care*, to guard them against withdrawing their confidence from him, whom, *till then*, they had looked up to, as the person

person who, at a proper time, would exhibit the necessary proofs of his being *the Messiah*, on account of those predictions, and looking out for others who might lay claim to that character. Ver 4, 5. *And Jesus said to them—Take heed lest any man deceive you; for many shall come in my name saying, I am the Christ*—or the Messiah, *and shall deceive many.* Nay—so strongly does he appear to have been impressed, with *the urgent necessity*, of this caution, and to have entered, *so thoroughly*, into their views, upon the subject that, having in the 21st verse, told them that *the afflictions of those times* would be such, as were not, *from the beginning of the world, to that time*—he, evidently, appears to have been unable to proceed in the dreadful detail of sufferings, which *were coming upon their nation*, without renewing, in the most earnest and affectionate manner, his caution to them, to beware least they should be drawn away from their stedfast attachment to him, as *the Messiah*, by the arts and artifices of Deceivers. Ver. 23, 24, *Then*, i. e. when those things, which he had before been describing, should come to pass—*if any Man shall say unto you—Lo here is the Christ*—or the Messiah—*believe him not; for there shall arise false Christs*—or false Messiahs—*and false Prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders, insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very Elect.* And, that this caution, thus energetically and repeatedly enforced, might make *the deepest impression* upon their minds, he adds this remarkable and solemn memento—*Behold I have told you before; wherefore, if they shall say to you—Behold he*—to wit, the Messiah, *is in the desert, go not forth—behold he is in the secret chambers* *, *believe them not.*

As it thus appears to have been *the first object* of our Lord, in St. Matthew's narration, to guard his Disciples against *Deceivers*, who should assume *the character of the Messiah*; so it is, likewise, in that of St. Mark, Chap. xiii. 5. 6. *And Jesus answered, and began to say,—Take heed lest any man deceive you—for many shall come in my name, saying I am the Christ*—or the Messiah—*and shall deceive many.* And, having

* Arch Bp. Newcome has very judiciously observed, upon this passage, "that the natural course of Impostors is, to increase their strength clandestinely "at first, and that the beginnings of those whose designs were never brought "to maturity, are too inconsiderable to be taken notice of in History." See his observations on our Lord's conduct as a divine Instructor, p. 194.

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described, *the exceeding greatness* of the calamities which were coming, upon the Jewish nation, he, in like manner, with St. Matthew, repeats the same caution, with the same intention; ver. 21—23. *Then, if any man shall say unto you—Lo here is the Christ*—or the Messiah—*or lo he is there, believe him not; for false Christs and false Prophets shall rise, and shall shew signs and wonders,* * *to seduce, if possible, even the elect.* And, with a like view, to its making the strongest impression upon their minds, he adds—*Behold I have told you before.* St. Luke, in his account of this prediction, does not repeat the caution—but, it is equally remarkable, that it stands *the foremost*, in answer to the questions of the Disciples. Ch. xxi. 8. *And he said,—Take heed that ye be not deceived—for many shall come, in my name, saying, I am the Christ*—or the Messiah—*and the time draweth nigh*, when the Messiah should appear—*Go not therefore after them.*

These cautions, so harmoniously related, by all the three Evangelists, as occupying *the first thoughts* of our Lord, in his reply to the question of the Disciples, upon the subject of *his coming*; the judicious Reader will, nay *must*, perceive, afford a demonstrable proof, that they did not, at this period, consider that Jesus had *yet* given them, such proofs of his being *the Messiah*, as they had affixed to *that Character*; for, if he had given them these proofs; it would have been not only, *unnecessary*, but absurd, to have cautioned them, in so very particular a manner, against *false Christs*, who might, afterwards, assume *the Character of the Messiah.*

* "They will GIVE, that is appeal to—promise, or undertake to produce, "such signs, using the very language of the Jewish Legislator—who repre-"sents a Prophet as *giving*, (Deut. xiii. 1 in the Septuagint) that is proposing "and appealing to a sign or wonder, whether it did, or did not come to "pass;"—Farmer on Miracles, p. 304. And again p. 307, 8. "They "shall give (or undertake to exhibit) great signs and wonders, says the "Prophecy: and the History relates the fact in perfectly corresponding "language. They *promised* to shew, or exhibit, evident wonders and signs." Jos. Ant. 20. 8. 6. And this very learned and excellent Writer thus explains Deut. xiii. 1. "To *give* a sign or wonder must mean the proposing and "appealing to any particular prodigy or portent, as a token or proof of a "divine interposition, as a declaration of the decrees of the Gods, and as "indication of of futurity."

Arch Bishop Newcome, from whom this note is taken, has some farther observations upon this subject, which the learned Reader may consult to advantage. See Observations on our Lord's conduct as a divine instructor, p. 186.

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But our Lord did not, upon this important occasion, stop here; for he not only cautioned them against *false Christs and false Prophets*—but he plainly avowed that *he himself*, actually did sustain *the Character of the Messiah*. v. 5 *Many shall come in* MY NAME, i. e. with my pretentions, to the Messiahship *and shall deceive many*. See also Mark xiii. 6. Luke xxi. 8. And, as the Disciples had expected him to appear, in the Character of *a temporal Prince*, to raise their Nation to the highest pitch of worldly prosperity; he, in opposition to this opinion, which they had so strongly imbibed, particularly, pointed out to them, *the true nature and manner of his coming*, to wit, that it would be, *in clouds*, or in the execution of vengeance. Matt. xxiv. 37. *As the days of Noah were*—which, most certainly were, days of vengeance—*so shall also the* nature of *the coming of the Son of Man* the Messiah *be*. In like manner St. Luke says, in a passage which, as will hereafter, with the fullest evidence appear, is parallel to this, Ch. xvii. 26. *As it was, in the days of Noah—so shall it be, in the days of the Son of Man*. And v. 28. *Likewise, as it was, in the days of Lot;* which were, likewise, *days of vengeance—even thus shall it be, when the true nature of the coming of the Son of Man*, the Messiah *is revealed*. Now, what was all this, but saying, in other words, what he had said, in the beginning of the xxivth Chapter of St. Matthew, concerning *the destruction of the Temple?* What was it, but forbidding them to indulge, the expectation of *his coming* as *a temporal Prince?*—What was it, in a word, but a direct and explicit answer to their question, *what shall be* THE SIGN *of thy coming?*

In the relation of St. Matthew, there is, an additional question, which is peculiar to St. Matthew; which the generality of Divines appear to have admitted, to relate, not to *the end of the World* but, to *the end of the Jewish Dispensation;* and, it seems to be no trifling presumption, in favor of this interpretation, that the questions of the Disciples, as related, in the parallel Chapters, both of Mark and of Luke, are confined, *solely*, to the prediction of our Lord concerning *the destruction of the Temple;* with which he, most evidently, connected, the full manifestation of *the true nature of his coming, as the Messiah*, in opposition to the manner in which *they* expected him to come as *a temporal Prince*. In St. Mark, Ch. xiii. 4. the Disciples are represented as saying—*Tell us, when*

when shall these things be, and, if they must be, *what sign will there be when all these things shall be fulfilled?* In St. Luke, it is said, Ch. xxi. 7, *they asked him saying—Master—but when shall these things be, and what sign will there be, when these things shall come to pass?*

The Reader will here, be pleased to observe, that though the *coming of Christ*—or of *the Messiah*, is not, particularly, mentioned in the questions, as stated by St. Mark and St. Luke—yet our Lord appears, evidently, to have understood it to be implied in their questions; for, as has already been observed—his first care was, to caution his Disciples to beware of *Deceivers who might assume the Character of the Messiah.*

As neither St. Mark nor St. Luke, put any question to Jesus, respecting *his coming as the Messiah*, though by the questions which they did put; it was plainly implied—so they likewise omit St. Matthew's additional question—*what shall be the sign of the end of the World*—or age—but, it is deserving of particular attention that, both of them, in common with St. Matthew, in their narration of the answer of Jesus, speak of *the coming of the end*, and nearly in the same words. St. Mark says—Ch. xiii. 7. *When ye shall hear of Wars and rumors of Wars—be ye not troubled; for such things must needs be—but* THE END *is not yet.* St. Luke says, Ch. xxi. 9. *When ye shall hear of Wars and Commotions—be not terrified—for these things must first come to pass—but* THE END *is not immediately.* * In like manner, our Lord says, as recorded by Matthew, Ch. xxiv. 6, *Ye shall hear of Wars and rumors Wars—see that ye be not troubled—for all these things must come to pass—but* THE END *is not yet.* So again, he says—V. 14. *This Gospel*—or good news *of the Kingdom*, i, e. of *the Kingdom of the Messiah*, which he had announced to be AT HAND, *shall be preached in all the world, for a witness*—or testimony *to all nations*, that the promise of *the coming of the Messiah*, in whom all the Nations of the Earth, should be blessed was fulfilling, *and then shall* THE END *come.*

If the answer which our Lord has here given, as related by these several Evangelists, and particularly by St. Mark and St. Luke, has any relation, to the questions of the Disciples and to his own prediction—THE END, so distinctly pointed

* Our Translators have rendered the Greek word *not immediately*, but, *by and by*—which seems not accurately to convey the Evangelist's meaning.

out,

but, and connected, with *Wars and rumors of Wars*, and *with Wars and Commotions*, must, as it should appear, relate to THE END *of the Jewish State.* And, if so, it is submitted to the judicious and attentive Reader, to consider, whether it is not the same, in signification, with the more full expression, which is contained in the additional question, recorded by St. Matthew—*What shall be the sign of* THE END *of the World*—or Age?

In the Prophecy of Ezekiel, concerning *the destruction of Jerusalem*—the language which is there adopted, so strongly resembles that which is made use of, by the Evangelical Historians, upon this subject, that it cannot fail to make a considerable impression, upon the mind of the Reader; especially, as it appears to refer to *that very destruction*, predicted by our Lord. Ezek. vii. 2. *Thus saith the Lord God unto the land of Israel*—AN END—THE END *is come upon the four corners of the land.* V. 3. *Now is* THE END *come upon thee.* And, in the 6th Verse, the same language is again repeated, as if, on purpose, to make the strongest impression, upon the mind of the Reader. AN END *is come*—THE END *is come*—*it watcheth for thee—behold it is come.*

It seems almost impossible to doubt that THE END here mentioned by the Prophet Ezekiel, with so particular an emphasis, and so closely adhered to, by all the three Evangelists, means THE END of the Jews, *as a Nation.* And it will not, perhaps, be thought very improbable, that when the Disciples put the question—*What shall be the sign of* THE END *of the World*; and Jesus, in his answer to it, might have had this passage, immediately, in their view. But however this be—there seems to be good reason for thinking that the phrase THE END *of the World* signifies, not *the final Judgement of the World*—but THE END *of the Jewish Dispensation*—or *the destruction of Jerusalem*; to which the prediction of our Lord, most indisputably, was confined. *

It cannot but be, extremely, satisfactory to find this *exclusive view* of the meaning of the questions of the Disciples

* The Reader who is inclined to attend to a more full investigation of the meaning of St. Matthew's additional question, *What shall be the sign of the end of the World?* is referred to the Appendix, No. I, where he will find some strong arguments to induce him to think that it relates, not to *the end of the World*, in the strict sense of that expression—but *to the end of the Jewish Dispensation.*

confirmed,

confirmed, by so able a Critic as the learned University Preacher. * "The Disciples" says he, "astonished and concerned at the denunciation of that severe sentence which involved, even the costly and magnificent structure of the Temple, came privately unto Jesus, saying—*Tell us—when shall these things be and what shall be the sign of thy coming and of the end of the World?* (Matt. xxiv. 3.) In the parallel place of Mark, (xiii. 4.) the question is put thus—*Tell us—when shall these things be and what shall be the sign when all these things shall be fulfilled?* And, in the correspondent passage of St. Luke, (xxi. 7.) the question is still differently proposed. *But when shall these things be and what sign will there be, when these things shall come to pass?* By comparing St. Luke with St. Matthew, we discover that the two questions of the latter relate entirely to one subject; the first to the time when the vengeance was to be inflicted—the second to the signs which were to precede its execution. If again we compare St. Luke with St. Mark, we perceive that the distinction which a late Writer would introduce between *these things*, and *all these things*, is utterly without foundation. (See Theolog. Repos. Vol. VI. p. 288.)" †

The learned University Preacher, with great propriety and good sense, goes on and says, "We may reasonably expect that as the information solicited, is confined to one event, the information communicated will be equally restricted. This presumption," he adds, "will be confirmed, by a perusal of the chapter, we are, at present considering; in which, from the third to the twenty-ninth verse, Our Saviour replies to the second question, by pointing out the signs which would enable the Disciples to prognosticate his coming;—He proceeds from the twenty-ninth verse, to answer the question, by defining the limits within which, both the desolation and his own glorious advent would certainly happen, and declaring, in the most solemn language, that they should come to pass, in that generation; but, as the

* Dr. Edwards's Sermon on the predictions of the Apostles, contains some strong marks of Critical Acumen, though mixed with a striking predilection, in favor of the sentiments of the Historian of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire.

† See Dr. Edwards's Sermon, pages 90, 91.

"precise

"precise time of their accomplishment was known only to "the Father, he concludes the chapter, by delivering an ex- "hortation to sobriety and vigilance." *

From this singularly accurate and judicious epitome of the xxivth Chapter of St. Matthew, it might naturally have been concluded that the whole of it, in his opinion, related to the advent of Jesus, as *the Messiah*. But no such thing; for in the true spirit of the Historian of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, he asserts that it was the advent of "the Son of "Man descending visibly from Heaven, before the generation "then existing was totally extinguished." And, in another place, he says, "Our Lord, in the xxivth of Matthew, de- "cisively foretells, that the generation then existing should not "be totally extinguished till it had witnessed his second and "glorious appearance in the clouds of heaven." Ibid. p. 23. 19. And from these premisses, he naturally enough concludes, that "the records of History do not authorize us to believe, "that this prediction was accomplished at the destruction of "Jerusalem." †. And in another place, he asserts that "this "awful prediction is not recorded among the stupendous "prodigies of the Jewish war." ‡

But, before a conclusion, so injurious to Christianity, should have been drawn, by the learned University Preacher, it should have been shewn, with, at least, some degree of probability, that *the coming*, mentioned in the questions of the Disciples—or in Jesus's answer to those questions, was such, as he has represented it to be, and that it cannot possibly, according to the rules of sound reasoning and legitimate interpretation, admit of any other sense; for there seems to be no reason why the advocates of Christianity, who are called upon, and are bound to defend it, against any objections which may be brought against it, which appear to them unfounded, should acquiesce in assertions, without proof—or admit conclusions from premisses to which there are well-founded objections! Now, this is a question of *fact*. Did the Disciples of Jesus, at the time when they put these questions to him, believe that *he was come*, in the sense, in which they expected him *to come*—or did they not? If they did, the learned University Preacher

* See Dr. Edwards's Sermon, p. 22.

† Ibid. pages 19, 20. ‡ Ibid. p. 23.

was,

was, certainly justified in affixing *another meaning* to their question concerning *his coming*—or to our Lord's answer to that question, and to have drawn the conclusion from thence, which he has drawn, however injurious it may prove to the interests of Christianity. Most fortunately however for its credit—the evidence that *the Messiah* was not, in their estimation, *yet come*—and that Jesus himself considered that he had *not yet given* them the necessary proofs of his being *the Messiah*, is as complete, as can be wished; for the former, after the Resurrection of Jesus,—after he had given them that astonishing proof that he was divinely commissioned by the Father, and had proved that he was *the Son of God*,—the Messiah—they doubted not that *then* was the time for his producing those proofs that he was *the Messiah*, which they themselves had affixed to that character. They therefore asked him, saying, *Lord wilt thou at this time*—now that we have before us such a remarkable attestation of thy being distinguished by the favor of Heaven, *restore the kingdom to Israel?* With respect to the latter, it must be repeated, that by his cautions not to listen to any who should pretend to *the character of the Messiah*—he very plainly shewed, what *the nature of his coming* was, which occupied both *his* and *their* attention. In a word; it may, without fear of contradiction, be asserted, that no man can read *the Gospel History* as *an History*, and as *an History of Facts*, with the attention and impartiality to which it is justly entitled, without being fully satisfied that, at the time when the Disciples put these questions, they continued to expect—not *the second coming* of Jesus, in the character of *the Judge of the World*—but his *first coming*, as *the Messiah*. If then, *the first coming* of Jesus, as *the Messiah*, is a natural and probable solution of the meaning of the question of the Disciples, concerning *his coming*, and of the answer of Jesus to it—if it be perfectly consonant with the idea of *the Gospels being Histories of this his* FIRST COMING, —why seek for any other meaning—or, for a meaning which is justified, by no one circumstance, either in the characters—or in the sentiments of those who put them—or in the reply of our Lord—but which, as will, hereafter, more fully appear, is contradicted by them all.

The conclusion of the learned University Preacher might now, it may be presumed, be very fairly supposed to be *erroneous*,—but it will be of considerable importance, if not absolutely

solutely necessary, to proceed to a more critical and minute examination, of our Lord's answer to the questions of the Disciples; for it appears, from what has been said, and particularly from the learned University Preacher's statement of the opinions of Divines, upon the meaning of the xxivth of Matthew, and the parallel chapters,—that there are very considerable difficulties in those chapters—difficulties which the learned University Preacher himself, notwithstanding his excellent Epitome, of the former of these chapters, appears very forcibly to have felt—difficulties in short, which the most learned and inquisitive, and, in fact, almost all who have paid any attention to them, have felt, and still continue to feel, in their interpretations of them!

With the fullest persuasion that this examination will be most advantageous to the Christian cause—the Reader is earnestly requested to give the closest attention to the following view of these chapters — particularly of the xxivth of Matthew.

Our Lord having, as has already been stated at large, in a very particular and impressive manner, guarded his Disciples against *the arts of Deceivers*, who might assume *the character of the Messiah*, immediately connects with this caution, with a view to render it the more effectual, a particular description of *the signs* which would precede the grand catastrophe of *the destruction*, which he had predicted, ver. 6, 7, 8. *Ye shall hear of wars and rumors of wars:—See that ye be not troubled*, in consequence of these presages—*for all these things must come to pass—but the end is not yet:—for Nation shall rise against Nation, and Kingdom against Kingdom, and there shall be famines and pestilences, and earthquakes in divers places: all these are the beginning of sorrows*, i. e. if there be any connection between the questions of the Disciples and the answer to them—of the troubles to which, in that calamitous time, they would themselves be exposed. But, to encourage them to perseverance, and to facilitate their escape; of which he gives them the strongest assurances, he points out to them, *some farther signs* of the approaching desolation, ver. 9—14. *Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill* some of *you*, *and ye shall be hated of all Nations for my name sake*, i. e. for adherence to me as THE MESSIAH:—*And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another, and many false Prophets shall rise and shall deceive*

deceive many, either by themselves pretending to *the Character of the Messiah*—or by pointing out others to them *as such*. *And because iniquity shall abound—the love of many shall wax cold: But he that endureth to the end—the same shall be saved.* * He shall not only be thoroughly satisfied, from the awful desolations, which are coming upon the Jewish nation, that *the Messiah's Kingdom* is of a very different nature, from what he had imagined—but by taking the warning, which I have given him—he shall be saved from the calamities, in which others, who regard not these warnings, shall infallibly be overwhelmed.

It has, again and again, in the course of this work, been observed, that our Lord, with the most distinguished tenderness and humanity, sympathized in the distresses and anxieties which he knew such ungrateful tidings as he had, from time to time, to communicate to them, could not fail to produce, upon their minds, and that, therefore, he offered them such seasonable consolations, as had a natural tendency, both to keep them from despondency, and to support their hopes and expectations, under the exigencies of the moment. And, it will readily be allowed that, in no case, was this sympathy, with the peculiar difficulties of their situation, more necessary, than when he was describing, the approach of calamities, the

* The attentive Reader will observe that this is precisely the same language which our Lord made use of, in his discourse with his Disciples, when he gave them their commission to announce the approach of *the Messiah's Kingdom*.

Dr. Lardner says, "our blessed Lord, speaking of the difficulties "these times, and of the declensions of some of his followers, encourages "faithfulness, in strong terms. Mark, xiii. 13. *And ye shall be hated of all "Men for my name's sake. But he that shall endure unto the end, shall be "saved.* And Luke, xxi. 17. 19. *And ye shall be hated of all Men for my "name's sake. But there shall not an hair of your head perish. In your patience "possess your souls.* And compare Matt. x. 21, 22. These gracious assurances were fulfilled at the destruction of Jerusalem. The difficulties "which the followers of Jesus met with, were very great. And the *love of "many waxed cold*, and some apostatized to Judaism, to avoid sufferings. "Nevertheless they gained nothing by it. They joined themselves to the "unbelieving part of the nation, and had part with them in the heavy calamities, which befel them. But the faithful followers of Jesus, who "were steadie to their profession, and attended to his predictions concerning "the coming calamities, and observed the signs of their near approach, "escaped, and obtained safety, with only the lesser difficulties of a flight, "which was necessary in the time of a general calamity." See Lardner's Jewish and Heathen Testimonies, Vol. I, p. 76.

most

most awful and the most affecting to them, *as Jews*, which the mind of man can conceive! He therefore assured them, as he had done, upon a former occasion—not only that their perseverance would, *ultimately*, be crowned with success—but he points out to them, *the very time when*, they might expect their deliverance. Ver. 14. *And this Gospel*—this good news *of the Kingdom*, i. e. of the Kingdom of the Messiah, *shall be preached throughout the whole World*, * or, as it is in St.

* Dr. Lardner's remark is, "that the original word does sometimes "signifie not *the whole World* but a particular country only." And, in a note referring to this he says, "the Greek word signifies *the Earth*: yet the "coherence of the words in many places determines the meaning to some par-"ticular country. Josh. ii. 3. *They be come to search out all the country.* Luke, "iv. 25. *But I tell you of a truth many Widows were in Israel, when the heaven "was shut up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the "land.* Not *all the Earth*, but *all the land* of Israel, that being the country "before mentioned.

"In like manner the Greek signifies, according to the original notation of "the word, the habitable, or rather, the inhabited Earth: but the connexion "of the discourse often restrains the meaning to some particular country. Isa. "xlii. 5. *They come from a far country—to destroy the whole land.* In the "Septuagint version it is all *the World*—or Earth—but what goes before and "follows, shews that a particular country is intended. V. 1. *The burthen of "Babylon which Isaiah the Son of Amos did see.* Ver. 19—22. *And Babylon "the glory of Kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldees excellency, shall be as when "God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. It shall never be inhabited, neither "shall it be dwelt in from generation to generation; neither shall the Arabian pitch "tent there, neither shall the Shepherds make their fold there: but wild beasts of the "desert shall be there and the wild beasts of the islands shall cry in their desolate "houses, and dragons in their pleasant palaces.* I know very well that some "understand the destruction of the whole land, in the 5th verse, of the whole "*Babylonian* Empire. But it is without reason. The whole Empire it is true "would be hereupon dissolved. But any one may perceive that the judgment "threatened or foretold is confined properly to the City and Province of "*Babylon*, the Seat of the Empire and of the oppresions now to be avenged. "Can any one bear the supposition that the dreadful destruction described "in this Chapter extended, or was intended to extend to all the parts of the "Babylonish Empire.

"St Luke himself used this word in this sense in another place—I think it "cannot be disputed: Luke xxi. 26. *Men's hearts failing them for fear, and "for looking after those things which are coming on the Earth*;—or the land. "The whole discourse relates to the calamities that were coming, not upon "*the whole World*, or the whole Roman Empire, but the land of *Judea*, "Ver. 21. *Then let them that are in* JUDEA *flee to the mountains.* Out of *Judea*, "therefore there would be safety. Ver. 23. *But woe unto them that are with "child, and to them that give suck in those days, for there shall be great distress "in the land, and wrath upon* THIS PEOPLE. And they who should be in the cir-"cumstances just mentioned, would thenbe particularly unhappy, because they "would be unfit for flight." See Dr. Lardner's Cred. Vol. I. pages 521, 522.

Mark,

Mark, Chap. xiii. 10. *must first be published among all Nations, and then shall the end come.*

The Disciples of Jesus, who were so well acquainted with our Lord's original language—that *the Kingdom of Heaven was at hand*, and who had received a commission *to announce its approach*, could not possibly have been at a loss to understand, what our Lord here meant, by the expression—*the Gospel*,—or good news *of the Kingdom*; for, as has repeatedly been observed, it was uppermost in their thoughts, and was most anxiously expected by them, at this very time. And that he here uses this phrase, in the same sense, as on former occasions, is sufficiently manifest, from his guarding them against *Deceivers*, who should assume the *Character of the Messiah!* And what he meant by *the end*, has already been very fully stated and is farther confirmed by the following verse, *When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation* *—or the abomination which maketh desolate—*spoken of by Daniel the Prophet, stand in the holy place—whoso readeth*—or rather perceiveth it—*let him understand*, i. e. let him take the warning, which this remarkable circumstance shall present to him, and follow my directions, for his security, at such an awful crisis! But that the whole of this description, from the 5th to the 16th verse, and particularly, the last part of it, expressed by the phrase *the abomination of desolation*, might not be misunderstood—or misapplied to any other event, than to *the destruction of Jerusalem*; it is immediately added v. 16. *Then*—i. e. at the time when this should happen—*let those who are* IN JUDEA *flee to the Mountains—let him who is upon the house top, not come down to take any thing out of his house—neither let him who is in the field return back to take his clothes*; the danger being so pressing as not to admit of the least delay. V. 19, 20, 21, 22. *And woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck* † *in those days—but pray ye that your flight be not in the winter,*

* "By the abomination of desolation—or the abomination that maketh "desolate," says Dr. Lardner, "is intended, the Roman Armies with "their ensigns. As the Roman ensigns, especially the Eagle, which was "carried at the head of every Legion, were objects of worship, they are, "according to the usual style of Scripture, called *an abomination.*"

† Dr. Lardner, with his usual judgment has observed, that "our Lord "delivers these predictions, of which he had the foresight, with marks of "great and undissembled compassion and tenderness. If all these desola-

 "tions

winter, neither on the Sabbath day: for then shall be great tribulation, such as was not, from the beginning of the world to this time—no—nor ever shall be! And except those days shall be shortened—there shall no flesh be saved—but for the Elect's sake, those days shall be shortened. After so tremendous a description of the calamities which were coming upon *the Jews*—our Lord appears to have felt the peculiarity of the situation of the Disciples, who expected, from *the coming of the Messiah*, the *aggrandisement*—not *the destruction of Jerusalem!* He therefore again repeats the caution, which in the beginning of his answer to the questions of the Disciples he had given them, *to beware of deceivers*, who should buoy they them up with false hopes of *the coming of the Messiah.* V. 23, 24, 25. *Then, if any man shall say unto you—lo here is the Christ*—or the Messiah—*or there, believe it not; for there shall arise false Christs and false Prophets, and they shall shew great signs and wonders, insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very Elect. Behold I have told you before.*

St. Luke, it has already been observed, does not repeat this caution—but his account of the calamities which were approaching, is given, with so marked a precision, that it might have been supposed to have been, utterly impossible, to have applied it to any other event, than to *the destruction of Jerusalem*, if precision could have exempted it, from an application to a distant, or remote period. Ch. xxi. 20, &c. *When ye shall see* JERUSALEM *encompassd with armies—then know that* THE DESOLATION THEREOF, *is nigh. Then let those who are in* JUDEA *flee to the Mountains, and let those who are in the midst of it depart out, and let not those, who are in the countries round about, enter thereinto; for these be the days of vengeance, that all things which are written concerning them, may be fulfilled. But woe unto those which are with child, and to those which give suck, in those days; for there shall*

" tions and calamities had been now present, and before his eyes, and if " they had been the calamities of his best friends; he could not have been " more affected. He his particularly touched with the foresight of the diffi- " culties of such as are helpless—the distresses of women with child—or " who have infants at their breasts. This is true compassion; the effect of " the sensibility of the human nature, which he is not ashamed of and does " not dissemble!" See Jewish and Heathen Testimonies, Vol. I. p. 46. 4to.

be great distress in THE LAND, *and wrath upon* THIS PEOPLE, *and they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations, and* JERUSALEM *shall be trodden down, by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.**

After such a marked precision, who could have imagined that so acute a Writer as Dr. Priestly, should have asserted that, "the only days of vengeance, particularly announced "by the Antient Prophets, to which Jesus here alludes, relate "to the judgments of God upon the Gentiles, who had shewn "enmity to the Jews, especially in their opposition to their re-"settlement in their own country;" for no assertion was ever more entirely destitute of foundation—or more directly contradicted by the whole tenor of St. Luke's account, and by the Antient Prophecies themselves, concerning *the Jewish Nation!* St. Luke, as has just been seen, says that, *the days of vengeance* were among the things which were written to be fulfilled of *the Jewish Nation;* and it is notoriously evident that the Prophets, actually did foretel, those very days *of vengeance*, so accurately described by St. Luke.

St. Luke, it is true, in his description of *the destruction of Jerusalem*, states that the effects of that awful calamity would be felt by *the Jewish Nation till the times of the Gentiles should be fulfilled;* which times, an experience of a long series of ages, has shewn are not yet fulfilled: but this, so far as appears, is the only circumstance, in St. Luke's account of this Prophecy, which has any relation to *the Gentiles*, except as the instruments of the approaching vengeance—or to a far

* Mr. Richards, in his Bamptonian Lectures says, "was it not contrary "to all probability, in the days of our Saviour, that the inhabitants of Judea "would be led away captive into all nations by the Romans? They had "before yielded to the arms of Rome and no such calamitous consequences "ensued: nay, it was the generous policy of that victorious people almost "uniformly observed, in the latter ages of the state, to leave to the van-"quished Kingdoms, the secure possession of the greatest part of their terri-"tories, and in general, their national polity and the exercise of all their "religious rites. In the instance of the Jews, alone; this custom was "flagrantly violated, and it is not, perhaps, unworthy of remark, that it "was violated, not by a stern, capricious, and sanguinary tyrant; a Tibe-"rius, a Caligula, or a Nero—but, by a prince who was the brightest "ornament of Imperial Rome—whose character was marked by an un-"bounded spirit of philanthropy, and who was distinguished, by the God "like appellation of the love and delight of mankind. Amor & deliciæ, "humani generis. p. 129.

distant period—or which can be so applied, without setting at nought all the rules of good writing—without disregarding the connection and occasion of the discourse—without, in short, rendering the Prophecies of Scripture, as vague and uncertain, as the most ambiguous of the antient heathen oracles.

But, to proceed, in the examination of the Chapter under consideration. After our Lord had, in the manner which has been related, cautioned his Disciples to be upon their guard against those, who might assume *the character of the Messiah*, in verses 24, 25, 26, he proceeds, in the verse immediately following, to give a particular reason for their not attending to any who should pretend to *that character*, and a very remarkable one it is! *For as the lightning cometh out of the east and shineth even unto the west,* * *so shall also* the nature of *the coming of the Son of Man*, the Messiah, for perspicuity, *be*. But how was that? The Evangelist himself answers this question, in the 37th verse—*As the days of Noah were, so shall also* the nature of *the coming of the Son of Man*, the Messiah, *be: for, as in the days which were before the flood, they were eating and drinking—marrying and giving in marriage until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and knew not until the flood came and took them all away—so shall also* the nature of *the coming of the Son of Man*, the Messiah, *be*. As if he had said,—When *the destruction* which I have been foretelling as about to come upon *the Jewish Nation*, shall take place; it shall then be as visible, as the lightning which illuminateth the whole heavens; that far from being raised, as they expected, to great temporal power, and worldly prosperity, by *the coming of the Messah*, they should, like the Co-temporaries of Noah, be overwhelmed with unexpected destruction—should be humbled to the very dust, and become a proverb and a bye word among the nations; *for there shall*, says St. Luke, *be great distress in* THE LAND, *and wrath upon* THIS PEOPLE, &c. A better commentary, upon our Lord's words—*As it was in the days of Noah*, &c. than these of St.

* "From Josephus's account," says Dr. Jortin, "it may be observed, "that the Roman Army entered into Judea on the east side of it, and carried "on their conquests westward, as if not only the extensiveness of the ruin, "but the very route, which the Army would take, was intended in the "comparison of *the lightning coming out of the East and shining even unto the "West.*" See Remarks on Eccles. Hist. p. 27.

Luke,

Luke, cannot be given, and the whole has, so evident a reference, to the fallacious hopes which were entertained, by every Jew, the disciples of Jesus themselves, not excepted, of their Messiah being *a temporal Prince*, who was to lead them to conquest and to empire, that no doubt can exist that Jesus had them immediately and exclusively in his view!

In the closest connection with *the coming of the Son of Man*, mentioned by St. Matthew, in the 27th verse, and in the subsequent part of the chapter, so accurately explained, to mean *a destruction*, similar to that which had happened *in the time of Noah*,—our Lord proceeds to state, by *a proverbial expression*, by what means this destruction would be effected, ver. 28. *For wheresoever the carcase is—there will the eagles be gathered together.* * "If the Reader calls to mind," says Bishop Hurd, "the prediction of our Lord, as it is elsewhere "expressed, without a figure—*When ye shall see Jerusalem* "*encompassed with armies*, Luke xxi. 20. and compares it "with the event, he will hardly make a doubt whether "*eagles*, in those figurative predictions which respect the "same subject, namely, *the destruction of Jerusalem*, were "not intended by our Lord to denote the Roman armies." † Archbishop Newcome likewise remarks, upon this passage, that "besides the proverbial allusion to birds that sagaciously "discover carcases and greedily devour them, there seems "likewise to be a beautiful reference to the Eagle, as the "Roman Standard." Observ. p. 194.

The extent of this awful desolation, mentioned in the preceding part of the chapter—the Evangelist goes on, in the 29th and following verse, still farther to delineate, in figurative, but strong language. *Immediately after*—or more properly *with*—or, *in connection with* ‡ *the tribulation of those days,*

* "In St. Luke, when our Lord had been describing this calamity which "was to befall the Jews, his Disciples asked him, *Where Lord?* where shall "this happen? To which he replied, *Wheresoever the body is, thither will the* "*Eagles be gathered together.* If then his words contain any direct answer to "the question, they must be understood as pointing out the place and "extent of the calamity. Jortin's Remarks on Eccles. Hist. p. 26. Vol. I.

† See Hurd on the Prophecies. Vol. I. p. 167.

‡ Archbishop Newcome has remarked that "in Mark—the expression "is—BUT IN THOSE DAYS, *after that tribulation*, &c. Hence," says he, "it follows that the words cannot be applied to the day of Judgement." See Archbishop Newcome's Observations, 249. Mr. Kett says—*immediately after*

days, shall the Sun be darkened, and the Moon shall not give her light, and the Stars shall fall from Heaven, and the powers of the Heavens shall be shaken, and then shall appear the sign of the Son of Man in Heaven; and then shall all the tribes of the earth—or rather of the land—*mourn, and they shall see the Son of Man*, the Messiah, *coming in the clouds of Heaven, with power and great glory.*

The language of St. Luke, it must be observed, is somewhat less figurative, and may, of itself, very properly, be considered as a good interpretation of the more splendid description of St. Matthew, chap. xxi. 25, 26, 27. *And there shall be signs in the Sun, and in the Moon, and in the Stars; and upon the earth, distress of Nations, with perplexity—the sea, and the waves thereof, roaring—Mens' hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the Earth; for the powers of the Heavens shall be shaken, and then shall they see the Son of Man*, the Messiah, *coming in a cloud, with power and great glory.* *

after may be translated, *amidst;* which is the more remarkable, as he refers our Lord's Prophecy—not to *the destruction of Jerusalem* only—but to *the end of the World.* See Kett on Prophecy, p. 246.

* "There should," says Archbishop Newcome, "be straightness of "calamity among those nations which rose against each other, with inextricable necessity, every object of terror striking them, every element seeming armed against them: men nearly expiring *through fearful expectation* of what impended over their country; for the whole frame of the "Jewish Constitution, both civil and religious, should totter to its foundation." See Archbishop Newcome's Observations, pages 250, 251. In this valuable work the Reader will find a more accurate and ample detail of the exact agreement of our Lord's predictions of *the destruction of Jerusalem* with the events accompanying it, than is to be found perhaps, in any other Writer. And he very justly remarks, "that without such a general "view of the history of that event, there are expressions in our Lord's "Prophecies relating to it, of which the Reader could not have an adequate "idea. See p. 237. See also Lardner's Antient Jewish and Heathen Testimonies, upon the same subject. And it is very concisely observed by Dr. Jortin, "that the History of the Jewish War by Josephus, seems to be a "Commentary upon the Prophecies of Christ. Josephus, amongst other "particulars, gives a distinct account of *the fearful sights and great signs "from Heaven* which preceded the destruction of Jerusalem, and Tacitus "has confirmed the narration of Josephus. If Christ had not expressly "foretold this, many who give little heed to portents, and who know that "Historians have been too credulous in that point, would have suspected "that Josephus exaggerated, and that Tacitus was misinformed; but as the "testimonies of Josephus and Tacitus confirm the predictions of Christ, "so the predictions of Christ confirm the wonders recorded by these Historians." See Jortin's Remarks. Vol. I. p. 41.

But

But whatever importance there may be, in these observations, most certain it is, that our Lord, in St. Matthew's account, uses a language to describe the effects of the calamities which were approaching, which, *as Jews*, could not but have been extremely familiar to *the Disciples*, and. indeed, to *every Jew*, who paid any attention to *the Prophetic Writings;* for it was in terms similar to his, that the antient Prophets, constantly described *the effects* of those calamities, which, at different periods of their History, had been inflicted upon *the Nations of the Earth*, whether they related to *Jews* or *Gentiles*. This has been noticed, by the most able Divines, and will be abundantly evident, from the following instances, taken from passages which are, beyond dispute, descriptive of *temporal calamities*, and of *temporal calamities* ONLY.

The Prophet Isaiah, speaking of *the destruction of Babylon*, says, chap. xiii. 9, 10. *Behold the day of the Lord cometh—cruel, both with fierce anger and wrath—to lay the land desolate: And he shall destroy the sinners thereof out of it; for the Stars of Heaven, and the constellations thereof, shall not give their light—the Sun shall be darkened, and the Moon shall not give her light.*

The same Prophet describes the destruction which was to come upon Idumea, in language, as strong as can well be imagined. Chap. xxxiv. 4, &c. *All the host of Heaven shall be dissolved, and the Heavens shall be rolled together as a scroll: and all their host shall fall down, as a leaf falleth off from the vine, and as a falling fig, from the fig tree.* Upon another occasion, he uses a similar language, ch. xxiv. 19, 20. *The earth is utterly broken down—the earth is clean dissolved—the earth is moved exceedingly—the earth shall reel to and fro like a drunkard, and shall be removed like a cottage—the transgression thereof shall be heavy upon it. It shall fall, and shall not rise again Then the Moon shall be confounded, and the Sun ashamed.* *

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* The observation of Archbishop Newcome appears to be very accurate. "The clearness of our Lord's Prophecies," says he, "deserves to be insisted on. They are generally delivered to his Disciples in plain historical language. Where figures occur, which happens very rarely, they are such as the Easterns were accustomed to, in their discourse and sacred writings. There is nothing obscure, or ambiguous, like the Antient Oracles;

The Prophet Ezekiel, announcing in the name of God, the future ruin of Egypt, says, chap. xxxii. 7, 8. *When I shall put thee out—I will cover the Sun with a cloud, and the Moon shall not give her light; All the bright lights of Heaven will I make dark over thee, and set darkness upon thy land, saith the Lord God.*

In the Prophecy of Joel, there is a passage which is particularly deserving of the Reader's attention, as it seems to be descriptive of this very calamity, of *the destruction of Jerusalem*, predicted by our Lord. Chap. ii. 1, 2, 3, 10. *Blow ye the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in my holy Mountain—Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble—for the day of the Lord cometh—for it is nigh at hand—a day of darkness and gloominess—a day of clouds and thick darkness—as the morning spread upon the Mountains—a great and a strong people—there hath not been ever the like—neither shall be any more after it, even to the years of many generations. A fire devoureth before them, and behind them a flame burneth. The Earth shall quake before them—the Heavens shall tremble—the Sun shall be dark, and the Stars shall withdraw their shining.*

The other phrase,—*The powers of the Heavens shall be shaken*, used by all the three Evangelists, is likewise agreeable to antient phraseology, and to that language which the Prophets made use of, when predicting *temporal calamities*, and particularly that of *the destruction of Jerusalem*. In the passage just quoted from the Prophecy of Joel, it is said,—*The Earth shall quake before them—the Heavens shall tremble.* And in Isaiah, the Prophet says, chap. ii. 19. *They shall go into the holes of the rocks, and into the caves of the Earth; for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of his Majesty, when he ariseth* TO SHAKE *terribly the Earth.* And the same expression is made use of again in chap. xiii. 13. *I will shake the Heavens, and the Earth shall remove out of her place, in the wrath of the Lord of Hosts, and in the day of his fierce anger.*

The Prophet Haggai has likewise, a very remarkable passage to this purpose. "The Prophet," says Mr. Dillinger, "is commanded by God to speak to Zerubbabel, Governor "of Judah, saying—*I will shake the Heavens and the Earth,*

"Oracles; except where he purposely concealed his meaning from the Jews, "under figure or parable. To his Disciples he spake with great plainness "and perspicuity. See his Observations, p. 263.

"chap.

" chap. ii. 21. This the Prophet himself illustrates, when it " is said, in the 22d verse,—*I will move Heaven and Earth,* " *and overthrow the throne of kingdoms, and destroy the* " *mighty realms of the Nations.* Here, says Mr. Michaelis, in " his Explanation of the Epistle to the Hebrews, sect. 352, it " is quite impossible to take *the moving of Heaven and Earth,* " otherwise than as of wars, and a political shaking, by which " kingdoms shall sink, and kingdoms rise. Great wars are " sometimes compared with a heaven and shaking storms, " and sometimes with an earthquake. And the oriental Poet, " in the description of it, sometimes makes even the heavens " to fall." *

Upon this subject, likewise, the great Sir Isaac Newton, has observed, " that in sacred Prophecy—the darkening, " smiting, or setting of the Sun, Moon, and Stars, is put for " the ceasing of a kingdom, or for the desolation thereof, " proportional to the darkness. Darkening the Sun, turning " the Moon into blood, and falling of the Stars, for the " same." And the late Bishop Warburton has remarked, that this language was borrowed from the Antient Hieroglyphics; for, says he, " as in hieroglyphic writing, the Sun, Moon, " and Stars, where used to represent States and Empires, " Kings, Queens, and Nobility—their eclipse and extinc- " tion, temporary disasters, or entire overthrow, &c.—so, " in like manner, the holy Prophets call Kings and Empires

* Dr. Clarke, says Dr. Benson, has very well paraphrased verse 29. " For, immediately after these fatal wars, and the destruction of Jerusalem " by the Romans, the whole Jewish polity, government, laws, and religion, " shall be utterly destroyed." And Mr. Le Clerc's Note appears to be very accurate, " Ce sont des expressions figurées, qui marquent dans les Prophetes " la ruine des Etats à l' occasion desquels ils les employent. Esaie " s' en sert ch. xiii. 10. en ecrivant la ruine de Babilone & ch. xxiv. 23. " en parlant de celle des Royaumes voisins de la Judée. Ezekiel decrit le " meme la desolation de l'Egypte, ch xxxii. 7. Jesus Christ ne veut donc " dire autre chose, si non que la Republique Judaique seroit detruite " pour toujours." in loc. Archbishop Newcome also has favored his Readers with the following passage from Maimonides. " Quando Vaticinatur " Esaias de Gentis alicujus destructione vel de populi alicujus magni interitu, " sit stellas cecidisse, coelos interisse, & contremiscere solem obscuratum, " terram vastatam & commotam esse. Maim: More Rev. 265." See Archbishop Newcome's Observations, p. 250. And to mention no more—Bishop Newton says, " that in the Prophetic language, great commotions and revolutions upon " earth, are often represented by commotions and changes in the Heavens." See his Dissertations on the Prophecies, Vol. II. p. 305. 3d Edition.

" by the names of the heavenly luminaries—their misfortunes " and overthrow are represented by eclipses and extinction: " Stars falling from the firmament, are employed to denote " the destruction of the Nobility, &c. In a word, the " Prophetic style seems to to be a speaking Hieroglyphic. " These observations," the Bishop adds, " will not only " assist us in the study of the Old and New Testament, but " likewise vindicate their character from the illiterate cavils " of modern libertines, who have foolishly mistaken that, " for the peculiar workmanship of the Prophet's heated ima- " gination, which was, the sober, established language of " their times, and which God and his Son condescended to " employ, as the properest conveyance of the high myste- " rious ways of Providence, in the revelation of themselves " to mankind." *

From the examples which have been laid before the Reader, of this kind of language, taken from *the Prophecies of the Old Testament;* and from the observations of these learned men, it must appear extremely evident, that our Lord copied it from them, and when this language is taken in connection with his preceding description of the calamities which he had predicted, as approaching, scarcely a single doubt can remain, that he meant to describe, by this language, the very extensive and durable effects which they would produce. Should, however, any one still think that Jesus used a strength of expression superior to that of the Prophets (which however does not appear to be the case) it may be observed, that it might naturally have been expected, that his quick sense of the greatness of those calamities, together with the affecting consideration of their *near approach*, would be discovered, in the peculiar strength of his language; for the calamities which were coming upon *the Jewish nation*—the Evangelists all concur in representing, as *tremendous in the extreme*, and such as never had been exceeded—or would be hereafter.

* Mr. Kett says, " that great and extraordinary political revolutions, such " as the fall of Kings and the overthrow of Governments, are represented by " the antient Prophets, by changes in the course of nature and disorder " among the heavenly bodies—extraordinary commotions among the lowest " classes of the people, by the raging turbulence and roaring of the Sea." And speaking of Matt. xxiv. 29. 30. he says, " Our Lord in the following " Prophecy uses the same metaphors with the same meaning." See Kett on Prophecy, Vol. I. pages 245, 246.

Thus Matt. xxiv. 21. *Then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time—no, nor ever shall be.* * Mark, xiii. 19. *In those days shall be affliction, such as was not from the beginning of the creation unto this time, neither shall be.* And, St. Luke calls them *days of vengeance.* In short, they all seem to labour for strength of expression, sufficient to describe *the greatness of the calamities* of those times. This seems not to have been sufficiently attended to, by the patrons of a double meaning, in these chapters; or, it may be presumed, they would have readily admitted, that the language of our Lord, related *solely* to the calamity which he had, in the preceding part of the chapter, been describing; especially, when they found all the Evangelists declaring, in the most unqualified and energetic terms, that *all these things* were to happen, *in that generation.* But of this more hereafter—In fine, the language of antient Prophecy appears to be, the only legitimate commentary, upon that of our Lord, in the verse under consideration; and to seek for any other, is only to puzzle and perplex, what appears to be, perfectly clear and intelligible, and free from all ambiguity. It must also be added, as particularly worthy of notice, that the very use of this language is one, among a multitude of strong internal characters, of the genuine authenticity of the History; for nothing could possibly have been more natural than for *a Jew*, to have expressed himself, more especially upon such a subject, in the language of antient Prophecy—not only as it must have been

* Mr. Kett has observed, upon this passage, that "though the history of "mankind, will furnish numerous instances of the hardships and sufferings "to which the inhabitants of great and populous cities have been exposed, "during a protracted siege; yet we may venture to assert, that the detail of "the horrible distresses, related by an eye witness, of the siege of Jerusalem, "exceeds any description that can be found, in any other Author, both, in "the nature and extent of the miseries to which it was subjected. Josephus "remarks, 'that all the calamities that ever befel any other nation, since the "beginning of the world, were inferior to those which happened to his "countrymen, at this awful period of their history.' And this fact is "corroborated, by the opinion of their enemies, who ascribe these extraordinary sufferings to the character of this extraordinary people, as some "extenuation of their own oppression and cruelty. Our Lord's emphatic "words therefore [illegible] considered, as hyperbolical, but as intended "to mark that [illegible]ilation of woe, which the peculiar aggravation "of the sins [illegible]uld draw down upon Jerusalem." See Kett on Prophecy.

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perfectly familiar to his hearers—but, afterwards, when they came seriously to reflect upon it, must have made a much deeper impression upon their minds.

With respect to the 30th verse, the learned University Preacher has indeed asserted that it seems strongly to oppose, if not irrefragably to refute the opinion, that the chapter relates ENTIRELY to *the destruction of Jerusalem*—but perhaps, a more accurate enquiry into the meaning of this verse will shew; not that *it opposes*, but in the fullest manner, confirms, the unity of sense which is here contended for. It hath already been shewn, with an evidence bordering upon demonstration, that the question of the Disciples—*What shall be the sign of thy coming*, means *the coming* of Jesus as *the Messiah*—or when he would manifest himself to them under that character, if what he had predicted concerning *the destruction of the Temple*, was to come to pass. It hath been shewn likewise, that in the answer to their question, Jesus asserted, in the 27th verse, that *the nature of his coming*, as *the Messiah*, would be as visible as the lightning which shone from East to West, and that *this coming* would, in fact, be *in vengeance*, as in *the days of Noah*: in other words, that *the coming of the Messiah*, instead of being, as they imagined, productive of great *temporal prosperity* to them as *a nation*, would, on the contrary, through their own fault, be most calamitous and destructive to them. This is so obviously the meaning of this verse, that it cannot, with any appearance of reason, be controverted, by those who view the Gospels, in the light in which they ought to viewed, *as histories*, and particularly *as histories* of the great controversy concerning *the true nature of the Messiah's Character*. Most consonant therefore to this declaration of our Lord, and indeed, as will hereafter more fully appear, to the general tenor of the whole chapter, is his assertion, that *all the Tribes of the land should mourn, and that they should see the Son of Man*, the Messiah, *coming in the clouds of Heaven with power and great glory*.

The coming of the Son of Man, in the clouds of Heaven; it must carefully be observed, was not *originally*, our Saviour's language—but like that in the preceding verse, was evidently borrowed from antient Prophecy; and like that also, it could not but have been perfectly familiar—not to the Disciples only—but to *the whole Jewish Nation*; particularly as they understood

understood it in a sense, the most favorable to their own worldly and ambitious views. Dr. G. Benson, in his Essay on the Unity of the sense of Scripture, has observed, "that "*Christ's coming in the clouds of Heaven with power and great* "*glory* is a plain allusion to Daniel vii. 13, 14. which Bishop "Chandler judiciously applies to our Saviour's receiving the "investiture in his new dignity, at the hands of God—or the "entering upon the exercise of his universal and everlasting "kingdom. Clouds are a known symbol of Heaven, and of "divine power and majesty. And the ascribing this symbol "to one like the Son of Man, is a declaration of *the supreme* "*magnificence and authority, which God shall give that Son* "*of Man, the Messias:* saith that eminent Jew, *Saadiah* "*Gaon.* See Bishop Chandler's defence of Christianity, p. 128, "&c. Sir Isaac Newton, likewise, (in his chapter of the Pro-"phetic language,) says—The heavens and the things there-"in, signifie thrones and dignities.—And *riding on the clouds* "is put for reigning over much people. Our Saviour, there-"fore, in prophetic language, foretells that all power should "be given unto him both in Heaven and upon Earth; "and when destruction was coming upon his enemies and "murtherers, then should all the Tribes *of the land* mourn, "and see evident signs of *Jesus*, his being invested with "*great power and glory;* which he would make use of to "take vengeance on his enemies, and to deliver his own "people out of their distresses." See Benson's Essay, pages 27, 28. *And Mr. Mede says—"this expression of *the Son* "*of Man's coming in the clouds of Heaven*, so often incul-"cated in the New Testament, is taken from, and hath "reference to the Prophecy of Daniel; being no where "else found, in the Old Testament. As our Saviour also "calls himself so frequently *the Son of Man* because Daniel "so called him, in that vision of the great Judgment, and "and that we might look for the accomplishment of what is "there prophecied of, in him; it was not in vain, that when

* Bishop Newton says, "In the antient Prophets God is frequently "described as coming in the *clouds*, upon any remarkable interposition and "manifestation of his power; and the same description is here applied to "Christ. The destruction of Jerusalem will be as ample a manifestation of "Christ's power and glory, as if he was himself to come visibly in the "clouds of heaven." See his Dissertations on the Prophecies, Vol. II. pages 305, 306.

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" our Saviour quoted the Prophecy of Daniel, he added—" *He that readeth let him understand.*" See Mr. Mede's first letter to Dr. Meddus, touching the great day of Judgment. 4to Edit. 1650. Vol. I. pages 424, 425.

Mr. Mede, it is true, understood this language to refer, not to *his first coming* as *the Messiah*, but to *his second coming to Judgment:* * But the Prophecy of Daniel, from which, he acknowledges our Lord to have borrowed his, cannot, without violence, be applied to any other, than to *his first coming.* Ch. vii. 13. *I saw in the night visions and behold one like the*—or a *Son of Man, came with the clouds of Heaven, and came to the Antient of Days, and they brought him near before him, and there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, and nations, and languages, should serve him.*

When the Prophet says that *the Son of Man came with the clouds of Heaven*, previous to there being given him *dominion, and glory, and a kingdom*, he appears particularly to have represented *the manner of his coming*—or in the execution of vengeance. And it is an observation of Dr. Gerard, that " the Jews could scarcely fail to perceive this; for the ex-" pression is used several times, in their own Scriptures, " and always means no more than this." It must also be extremely obvious to every one that as *clouds* produce darkness and not unfrequently storms and tempests, which are sometimes attended with tremendous desolation—the expression became a very convenient, and at the same time, a very significant symbol, to denote *great national calamities* and *the*

* Mr. Mede when he asserted that it was not in vain that our Saviour said —*He that readeth let him understand*, says truly, but he should have attended to the connection of this passage; which is, that they should *see the abomination of desolation*, and that THEN *those who were in Judea were to flee to the mountains.* Now what has this to do with the great day of Judgment? If the sense of these passages be as Mr. Mede contends for—of what use is language? But let the Reader judge for himself. Matt. xxiv. 14, 15, 16. *And this Gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world, for a witness to all nations, and then shall the end come. When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the Prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth let him understand): Then let them that are in Judea flee to the mountains.* The passage in St. Luke which appears to be parallel to this is, Ch. xxi. 20, 21. *And when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with Armies—then know that the desolation thereof is nigh—Then let them that are in Judea flee to the mountains.* Mark xiii. 14. *When ye shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the Prophet, standing where it ought not, (let him that readeth understand) then let them that be in Judea, flee to the mountains.*

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ruin of states and empires. When therefore our Lord used this expression of the Prophet Daniel, in the closet connection with his prediction of *the destruction of Jerusalem*, and in connection too, with *the coming of the Son of Man*; which *coming* he had declared would take place, before his Apostles had gone over the cities of Israel, and while some who heard him were still living—what better evidence can possibly be required, that by *his coming in clouds*—or in *the clouds of heaven*, he meant to say, that when they saw the awful calamity, which he had predicted, they would see how much they had mistaken *the true nature of the Messiah's character—they should see the Son of Man*, the Messiah, *coming in the clouds of Heaven, with power and great glory.*

The learned University Preacher has indeed mentioned an ingenious Writer, as very justly observing, that "Christ "was no more visibly present at *the destruction of Jerusalem*, "than at the Earthquake at Lisbon—or the siege of Gibraltar." And the fact may be admitted without the smallest detriment to Christianity; for if the Gospel History had been attended to, as *an History*, and as an History of the great Controversy concerning *the nature of the Messiah's Character*—they would not have interpreted our Lord's language as predicting *a personal appearance*, at *the destruction of Jerusalem*—but only as a declaration that by that awful event they would have the fullest proof that no such person as they had expected under *the character of the Messiah* would appear, and that *the coming of the Son of Man*—as the Messiah—instead of being connected with their obtaining *the empire of the world*, would, as the Prophet had foretold, be in vengeance—or *in the clouds of Heaven.* It must also be added, as well worthy of the judicious Reader's attention, that the verse under consideration, contains a direct and explicit answer to the question of the Disciples, *What shall be the sign of thy coming?* Why says our Lord—*then shall appear the sign of the Son of Man in Heaven—the Son of Man coming*—not in the splendour of victory, and with the trophies of conquest—but in *clouds*—in the execution of those judgements; the particular signs of which he had, at length detailed, in the preceding part of the Chapter.

If there is satisfactory evidence from the comparison of our Lord's language, in these two verses, with that of the prophecy of Daniel, that he borrowed it from him; it will naturally

naturally and necessarily follow that the Disciples could not possibly understand him, in any other sense than as describing *temporal calamities* and temporal calamities *only*, in opposition to the opinion which they, in common with the rest of their countrymen, had hitherto entertained, that *his coming* as *the Messiah* would be to render them victorious over all their enemies. It is indeed difficult to imagine how our Lord, as *a Jew*, and as one claiming a character so very different from that which they had expected, could have expressed himself, more fully—or in a manner better calculated to make an impression upon their minds upon a subject which, in its own nature, was so delicate and so disagreeable, than by the adoption of a language which was familiar to them, and the authority of which they could not dispute.

To suppose, on the contrary, that these verses were intended to describe *the final Judgment of the world*, is indeed violently to sever them from their manifest connection—not only with the preceding verses—but, as will presently appear, from the subsequent context; which, in the strongest terms which language can convey, asserts that all the things which he had before been describing, would be *in that generation*. It would be to violate all the rules of probability and just criticism and to charge the Evangelical Historians with such a confusion of ideas and such a perversion of language as would render them utterly unworthy of any regard; for, as the learned University Preacher has very justly observed—"when-"ever the same word is used in the same sentence—or in "different sentences, not far distant from each other; we "ought to interpret it precisely, in the same sense, unless "either that sense should involve a contradiction of ideas—"or the Writer expressly informs us that he repeats the word "in a fresh acceptation." *

In pursuing this examination—the judicious Reader will probably have little reason to doubt that the connection is continued in the 31st verse. *And he*, viz.—the Son of Man, says the Evangelist, *shall send his Angels*—or rather his Messengers—as the Greek word properly signifies, and as it is translated in Mark i. 2. vii. 24. *with a great sound of a trumpet and they shall gather his Elect, from the four winds—from one end of Heaven to the other.*

* See Edwards's Predictions of the Apostles, page 14.

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If this verse be, as some have supposed, descriptive of *the preservation of the Elect*, in the midst of the calamities which had been predicted, as coming upon the Jewish nation, it may, perhaps, not be undeserving of notice, that this is not the only intimation of such a preservation, in the chapter under consideration; for in the 13th verse it is said—*He that shall endure to the end*—i. e. he that shall continue faithful to me, as *the expected Messiah, the same shall be saved.* And, in the 22d verse, it is said,—*Except those days shall be shortened—there shall no flesh be saved—but for the Elect's sake those days shall be shortened.* St. Luke says expressly—*When ye shall see these things*—the calamities which he had before been describing, *begin to come to pass—then look up—for your redemption draweth nigh.*

But though, it from hence clearly appears that the faithful adherents of *the Messiah*, were to expect deliverance from the calamities which were coming upon the Jewish Nation—yet the judicious Reader will, perhaps, be inclined to think it more probable, that as the two preceding verses are descriptive of the total subversion of the Jewish state and government, in order to make way for *the reign of the Messiah*—or of the establishment of *the kingdom of God*—the Evangelist intended to point out, under the character of Angels—or Messengers—the sending forth his Apostles and other Missionaries to announce, throughout the world, the glad tidings of *the kingdom of God*, and to make converts to the Religion which he was about to offer to the general acceptance of mankind. This sense seems to be very strongly confirmed by the prophecy of Daniel, already mentioned; which connects the coming in clouds—or in vengeance with *there being given to the Son of Man*, the Messiah, *dominion, and glory, and a kingdom*; which seems necessarily to imply, the use of all proper means—such as the sending of the Apostles and other Ministers, to gather converts from the four winds—from every quarter of the globe, to become the subjects of his kingdom. * This connection

* Bishop Newton, upon this verse says, "this is all in the stile and "phraseology of the Prophets, and stript of its figures meaneth only, that "after the destruction of Jerusalem, Christ by his Angels or Ministers, will "gather to himself a glorious church out of all the nations under Heaven. "The Jews shall be *thrust out*, as he expresseth himself in another place, "(Luke xiii. 28, 29.) *and they shall come from the East, and from the West, "and from the North, and from the South; and shall sit down in the Kingdom*

 "*of*

connection appears to be perfectly natural and to harmonize, most exactly, not only with the whole tenor of the preceding part of the chapter, but what is particularly worthy of notice, with the verses immediately following; for he their leads them, by a most apt and happy similitude to expect *the near approach of the kingdom of God*—or of *the Messiah. Now learn a parable*—or instruction *from the Fig-tree.* * *When its branch is yet tender and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh: so likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors.* St. Mark's expression is very little different from that of St. Matthew, chap. xiii. 29. *So ye, in like manner, when ye shall see these things come to pass, know that it is near even at the doors.*

The judicious and attentive Reader will perceive that there is some ambiguity in both these passages, both in the original and in the translation—but that ambiguity will, most happily, be completely removed, by comparing them with the corresponding passage, in St. Luke, chap. xxi. 31. *So likewise ye, when ye see these things, know ye,* not that IT—but *that* THE KINGDOM OF GOD *is nigh at hand.*

Here is so marked a condescension to the prejudices and peculiar sentiments of the Disciples of Jesus relative to *the coming of the kingdom of God*—or of *the Messiah,* which they expected Jesus, *as such,* to set up, and so direct a reference to their question—*What should be the sign of his coming?* that it is truly astonishing how, after comparing these passages together, they could possibly have been mistaken—or how any other meaning could have been affixed to them. But Mr. Mede, though in general, remarkable for his modesty, as a Writer, has been very positive that *the kingdom of God* has here, a very different meaning. "I deny not," says he, "but firmly believe, that Christ's kingdom took "place at *his first coming*—but I utterly deny that to be the

"*of God.*" and he adds, "no one ever so little versed in history needeth "to be told, that the Christian religion spread and prevailed mightily after "this period; and hardly any one thing contributed more to the success of "the Gospel, than the destruction of Jerusalem, falling out in the very man-"ner, and with the very circumstances so particularly foretold by our blessed "Saviour." See Dissertations, Vol. II. p. 306.

* "The opening of the Parable," says Dr. Townson, "as it stands in "St Luke, shows that Christ did not instance in the budding of the Fig-"tree only—but that of all the trees, as a sign of approaching summer." See his Discourses, p. 48. 8vo. Edit.

"kingdom

"kingdom our Saviour Prophesies of Luke xxi. 31. and "answerably in the other Gospels." * And the learned University Preacher, in a note referring to this very passage of St. Luke, quotes Dr. Sykes as "very candidly allowing "that, by *the kingdom of God*, we are here to understand, "its glorious state and perfection in a future world." And, what is particularly remarkable—the learned Preacher, has himself, peremptorily asserted, and that without the least appearance of doubt, or hesitation, that "any other inter-"pretation would indeed be utterly groundless." † But upon what foundation has he made this bold and confident assertion? Is it a groundless supposition—when the Evangelist Luke says—*When ye shall see these things*—or, as it is in St. Matthew—*all these things*—that both of them refer to *the things*, which, in the preceding parts of those chapters, they had been describing? Is it a groundless supposition that Jesus, who originally began his ministry, by declaring that *the kingdom of Heaven was at hand*—who told his Disciples that *they should not taste of death till they saw the Son of Man*—the Messiah, *coming in his kingdom*—who, in this very chapter, continued to hold out the expectation of *his coming* as *the Messiah*, at the same time, cautioning them against *deceivers* who might assume *that Character*—who, in short, in this connection, told them that *this Gospel*, this good news of THE KINGDOM, *should be preached in all the world, for a witness to all nations*?—Is it, with these uncontrovertible facts, in view, a groundless supposition, that Jesus should mean by *the kingdom of God*, the *coming*, or the establishment of *the kingdom of the Messiah*? Can it be denied, without denying the most direct and positive evidence—without contradicting the whole tenor of the Gospel History, that *the kingdom of the Messiah* was *still expected*, both by the Disciples of Jesus, and by the whole Jewish Nation? And where could it have been expected that he should have asserted *its near approach*, more naturally, than when he had, by his prediction of *the destruction of Jerusalem*, been annihilating, *the very foundation* of all their hopes, of his being *a temporal Prince*? ‡

But,

* See Mr. Mede's Answer to Mr. Hain's Third Letter, 377.

† See Edwards's Sermon, p. 33, in the Note.

‡ It might farther be observed, in opposition to the opinion of these learned men, that it is the grossest perversion of language which can well be

But, the confutation of this very absurd opinion, of these learned men, so injurious to the perspicuity of scripture, and to the interests of Christianity, lies within a still narrower compass, and will, it may be presumed, thoroughly satisfy every unprejudiced and impartial enquirer, that they have *totally* mistaken the true meaning of this passage; for, if there was no other evidence of this—the verse immediately following, would be fully sufficient for the purpose; especially, when it is recollected, that it has the concurrent tesimony of both the other Evangelists, and is, a direct and explicit answer to the question of the Disciples—*When shall these things be?* And what makes this harmonious testimony the more valuable is, that all of them introduce it, precisely, in the same connection, and, almost, in the same words. Matt. xxiv. 34. *Verily I say unto*—THIS GENERATION *shall not pass away till all these things be fulfilled.* And, as if our Lord had not thought this declaration sufficiently strong, and he was determined it should make, the most forcible impression which language could convey, he adds, what the other Evangelists have likewise recorded, ver. 35. *Heaven and Earth shall pass away—but my words shall not pass away.*

The late Bishop Newton was so strongly impressed with the emphasis and energy of this language, that he thus forcibly expresses himself upon it. "It is to me a wonder how any "man can refer part of the foregoing discourse to *the destruc-* "*tion of Jerusalem*, and part to *the end of the world*, or any "other distant event, when it is said so positively in the "conclusion—*All these things shall be fulfilled in this gene-* "*ration.* It seemeth as if our Saviour had been aware of "some such misapplication of his words, by adding yet greater "force and emphasis to his affirmation, (ver. 35.) *Heaven and*

imagined. If Jesus meant by THE KINGDOM OF GOD *its glorious state and perfection in a future world*—how inapposite was *his Parable of the Fig-tree*, in which he asserts, that as by its budding and putting forth leaves they knew that Summer was nigh—so when the things which he had just been describing, should come to pass—they would know that *the kingdom of God was nigh at hand.* If this language does not convey the idea of *its near approach* —then, as has just been observed—language is of no use! If the Gospel had been considered as *an history*, and particularly as an history of the great controversy concerning *the coming* annd the establishment of *the kingdom of the Messiah*; no doubt could have been entertained of the true meaning of the passage in question!

"*Earth*

" *Earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass* " *away.* *

It is truly astonishing that this learned Prelate, after having thus strongly expressed his surprize that any one should refer, part of the foregoing discourse, to *the destruction of Jerusalem* and part to *the end of the world*—or to any other distant event, should himself, almost immediately afterwards, have asserted that " some of these passages, particularly v. 29, 30, " and 31, in a figurative sense may be understood of *the des-* " *truction of Jerusalem*—but that, in their literal sense, they " can be meant only of *the end of the world*;" † for nothing can be more evident, than that the Prophets, in a multitude of instances, and after them our Lord, spoke in a metaphorical, or figurative, without in the least regarding *the literal sense* of their expressions; and that they did so, in the passages here refered to, is plain from the comparison of them, which has already been laid before the Reader; for, there is not, the smallest reason for supposing that the Prophets had any view, in those passages to *the end of the world*, and *the general judgment*—and that our Saviour himself had no such view—his declaration that his prediction would be accomplished in that generation, upon which the learned Bishop very justly lays such stress, is, if any thing can be, *a decisive proof*: for this expression, it must be particularly observed, will have equal force, whether these verses alluded to, be understood *figuratively*—or *literally*, and will equally militate against the Bishop's opinion.

But the learned Prelate has produced his reasons for the application of these Verses to *the end of the world*, which it will be proper attentively to consider. " Hitherto," says he, " we have explained this xxivth chapter of St. Matthew as " relating to *the destruction of Jerusalem*, and without doubt, " as relating to *the destruction of Jerusalem*, it is *primarily*, " to be understood. But though it is to be understood of this " *primarily*, yet it is not to be understood of this *only*: for " there is no question that our Saviour had, a farther view " and meaning in it. It is usual with the Prophets to frame " and express their prophecies so, as that they shall compre-

* See Bishop Newton's Dissertations on the Prophecies, p. 339, 3d Edition, Vol. II.

† Ibid. p. 347.

" hend

" hend more than one event, and have their several periods of " completion. This, every one must have observed, who " hath been ever so little conversant in the writings of the " antient Prophets; and this, I conceive, to be the case " here, and *the destruction of Jerusalem* to be typical of *the* " *end of the world.* The destruction of a great city is a lively " type and image of the end of the world; and we may ob- " serve, that our Saviour no sooner begins to speak of *the* " *destruction of Jerusalem*, than his figures are raised, his " language is swelled, and he expresseth himself in such " terms, as in a lower sense indeed are applicable to *the de-* " *struction of Jerusalem*, but describe something higher in " their proper and genuine signification." And, after having quoted, at length, Matt. xxiv. 29, 30, 31, he adds, " These " passages, in a figurative sense, as we have seen, may be " understood of *the destruction of Jerusalem*,—but, in their " literal sense, can be meant only of *the end of the world.* *

It might, perhaps, be sufficient to confute this opinion, simply to refer the Reader to the Bishop's own words, already quoted. " It is to me a wonder," &c.—but this is a matter which is of too great importance to the vindication of the Evangelical Historian, to be passed over slightly. Now the question, in this case is,—What was the true meaning of the prophecies from which the learned Bishop has admitted our Lord to have drawn his language? Did the Prophets, when they predicted the downfall of *Babylon*,—of *Idumea*—and of *Jerusalem*, consider them as *types of the last Judgment*—or did they not? Are there the least traces, in those prophecies, of their having alluded to such an event? The destruction of a great city, certainly may be considered, as a lively type and image of *the destruction of the world*;—but unless the Prophets, from whom our Lord borrowed his language, actually did make use of it, as such, the Bishop's reasoning must lose all its force.

But, not to lay any particular stress upon this—the Bishop has himself, as it should seem, completely confuted his own opinion, upon this subject, when he says, † that " Com- " mentators (speaking of Matt. xxiv. 29.) generally under-

* See Bishop Newton's Dissertations on the Prophecies, page 347, 3d Edition, Vol. II.

† Ibid. p. 303.

" stand

" stand this and what follows of *the end of the world*, and of " *Christ's coming to judgment*,—but," says he, " the words " *immediately after the tribulation of those days*, show evi- " dently, that he is not speaking of any distant event, but of " something immediately consequent upon the tribulation " before mentioned, and that must be *the destruction of Je-* " *rusalem*. It is true his figures are strong, but are no " stronger than are used by the Antient Prophets, upon " similar occasions." *

More, perhaps, has been said, in reply to the learned Bishop's reasoning, in favor of a double meaning, than was absolutely necessary, had it not been that the errors of great men are, too often, implicitly adopted, without a close and attentive examination. This appears to have been the fact, in the present instance; for Dr. Macknight, in his Harmony of the Gospels, with a like strength of language with Bishop Newton, has observed, that " our Lord has forbidden us to " understand any part of this Prophecy, *primarily*, of *the* " *destruction of the world;* having connected all its parts, in " such a manner, that the things foretold, whatever they are, " must have happened in close succession. For any Inter- " preter," he adds, " to correct Christ's language here, and " to say that, in the 29th verse, *immediately after*, signifies " two or three thousand years after; and that, in the 34th " verse, *all these things*, signifies only *some* of them, " is a liberty which cannot safely be taken with his " words." †

If Dr. Macknight had not read Bishop Newton upon this subject, it seems to be, by no means improbable, that he would never have inserted, in this very impressive passage, the word *primarily*—but, whether he took it from him—or it was the suggestion of his own mind, is not very material. It is of much more consequence, to observe that his reasoning will apply, as pointedly against a *secondary*, as against a *primary* signification; which he has, so justly considered as *improper and unsafe;* for, it will still remain true, that our Lord has connected all the parts of this Prophecy, in such a manner,

* If this is not a direct confutation of the Bishop's own reasoning it will be difficult to say what is.

† See Macknight's Harmony, Vol. II. p. 131, 1st Edition.

that

that the things foretold, whatever they are, must have happened in close succession, or *in that generation.* *

It will be unnecessary to dwell upon Dr. Macknight's reasons for the insertion of the word *primarily*, in the forecited passage; as they differ, but little, from those of the learned Prelate—but, it is remarkable enough, that his manner of expression shews that he was, very far from being satisfied, of the justness of the distinction. "I will not," says he, "deny that the destruction of the Jewish state *may* prefigure "*the dissolution of the world*; at the same time, I think the "reasons offered above, forbid us to interpret the Prophecy "*primarily* of that destruction." † This is modest enough, —but it will, hereafter be seen, that in his Paraphrase and Notes on St. Paul's Epistles, he refers to this, and the parallel chapters of Mark and Luke, to prove that St. Paul is treating of *the day of judgment*, in the first and second Epistles to the Thessalonians, without so much as hinting at this distinction—or informing his Readers whether he is considering them in their *primary* or *secondary* signification. This is a mode of proceeding which cannot be too strongly reprobated, as it is contrary to all principles of sound reasoning, and indeed of common sense. But more of this hereafter.

It is certainly an irksome part of the duty of an enquirer after truth, that he frequently finds himself obliged to differ from persons of the greatest note, in the Christian and literary world: but, if he is influenced, purely by a conviction of the

* The learned and ingenious Author of Letters on Infidelity (Bp. Horne) having observed that "our Lord, Luke xxi. in that figurative and majestic "style, well understood by those who understand the language of Scripture, "describes *the destruction of the Jewish polity* and system"—adds—"the "terms may and do apply to the end of the world, for this obvious reason, "that the two events are in many instances parallel and analogous. His own "declaration shews plainly of which, he was *primarily* and immediately "speaking. *This generation shall not pass away till all these things are fulfilled:* "and the figures are those usually employed, in like case, by the Prophets "of old." p. 283.

Here it may be observed, that it may justly be doubted whether the two events are *parallel and analogous.* Our Lord does indeed shew, plainly, what he was speaking about, by confining the events described to *that generation*, and this language ought, in all reason, to have been sufficient to prove that the Jewish polity and system were *the only* matters he had been discoursing about. With respect to his subsequent language; it will presently be fully proved that it has a relation to the same subject, and to that only.

† Ibid. p. 132.

rectitude

rectitude of his sentiments—no blame can fairly attach to him. Besides, it should be remembered, that men of great note, when they commit mistakes, may, by the sanction of their names, stamp a degree of credit, even upon *error*, which may be of the most serious consequence to the Interests of Truth.

This seems, but too plainly, to have been the case, in the present instance, for, even Mr. Kett, one of the latest Writers, upon the subject of the Prophecy, contained in Matthew xxiv. and the parallel chapters, says "By the "parable of the Fig-tree, Our Lord assures his Disciples, "that the signs *immediately* preceding *the destruction of* "*Jerusalem*, should be so plain, that the most common "attention to passing events, would enable them to see, and "to avoid the impending evils which he had, as plainly "foretold; and immediately adds, *Verily I say unto you, this* "*generation shall not pass away till all these things be ful-* "*filled*. These words therefore seem obviously restricted, "in their *primary* sense, to the numerous circumstances "which he had most accurately described as *signs* of that "event, in which his Disciples felt themselves peculiarly, "nay personally, interested." * And yet Mr. Kett has asserted, after having quoted St. Mark's account, that "the parallel passages of St. Matthew and Luke plainly "indicate that this enquiry (of the Disciples) respected *the* "*destruction of Jerusalem, the second coming of our Lord,* "and *the end of the world*—events," says he, "which they "possibly expected to happen together, and to which the "reply of our Lord evidently refers." See p. 199.

The earnestness with which *a secondary sense* of our Lord's Prophecy, under consideration, has been contended for, by these and other Writers, which might be mentioned, is somewhat extraordinary, as it seems to be productive of no one advantage to Christianity—but rather tends, on the contrary, to divest it of *its simplicity* and to incumber it, with insuperable difficulties. The doctrine of *a future state*, is so clearly and unequivocally taught, in other parts of the New Testament, that there appears to have been no necessity for having recourse to *types and secondary senses*, to prove

* See Kett's History the Interpreter of Prophecy, Vol. I. pages 247, 248. 3d Edition.

it! Besides, as Mr. Richards, has most judiciously observed, in his admirable Bamptonian Lectures, "The Gospel dispensation was final. It prepared not the way, nor looked forward to any other. It was not necessary therefore to have recourse to typical ceremonies—or secondary senses, either in the institutions or in the predictions delivered by its holy Founder and his inspired Apostles; consequently no traces of them will be found in the New Testament, if we except the remarkable instance of a double meaning, in the Prophecy of our Lord, in which he intermingles *the destruction of Jerusalem* with *the general judgment of the world.*" *

The merits of this very superior Writer can scarcely be too highly appreciated—but from his manner of expressing himself, it must have struck him very forcibly that *a single exception*, was indeed a remarkable instance of a double meaning—but, perhaps, a reconsideration of this subject, will induce him to think that there is, in reality, no trace whatever, throughout the whole of the New Testament, of any *secondary senses* or *typical representations*.

If these remarks upon the impropriety of *a double meaning*, as contended for, by these Writers, shall be found, upon examination, to be just; it will follow that the assertion of our Lord, that *all the things* which he had been describing, in the preceeding part of the chapter, were to happen, in *that generation*; which appears to have made such a forcible impression upon them, must necessarily include *the coming of the kingdom of God*, in the 32d verse, and consequently, that Mr. Mede, Dr. Sykes, and the University Preacher were mistaken when they asserted that it meant, *its glorious state and perfection in a future world*. †

But to proceed in the examination of the remaining part of of the chapter.—Our Lord having, in the strongest and most peremptory terms, in the 34th and 35th verses, asserted that the time was coming on, for the completion of his prediction of *the destruction of Jerusalem*, and having, in the most express terms, told them that it would, most certainly happen, *in that generation*; goes on, in the 36th verse, to assure

* See Richards's Bampton Lectures, p. 224.

† The only possible objection to this reasoning appears to be, that the word *generation* is capable of a very different meaning—but for this see the Appendix, No. II.

them,

them, that beyond that, he had no information to communicate to them, upon the subject. The exact moment, or period when this judgment was to be executed—or when *the dissolution of the Jewish government*, should completely take place, and make way for the establishment of *the kingdom of God*—or of *the Messiah*, he tells them, lay hid in the bosom of the Father. *Of that day and hour knoweth no man —no, not the Angels of Heaven, but my Father only.* St. Mark's words are, chap. xiii. 32. *neither the Son but the Father.* St. Luke, it must be observed, hath nothing, which is exactly parallel—though, as will presently be seen—he has what, very sufficiently, expresses the sense of the former part of the verse.

Dr. Benson, in his Essay on the Unity of the sense of Scripture, is of opinion that our Lord's answer to the question of the Disciples—*What shall be the sign of thy coming and of the end of the world*, begins here, and that all the preceding part of his discourse relates, *solely*, to *the destruction of Jerusalem:* and, so far, it appears, that his opinion is perfectly consistent with that *unity of sense* for which he, so strenuously and so justly contends. But there are some strong objections to this hypothesis, which it will be necessary to lay before the Reader.

Previous however to this, it will be proper to state this learned Writer's opinion at full length. "Ver. 36, &c.— "Our Saviour proceeds to answer the other question of the "Disciples, viz. *What shall be the sign of thy coming and of "the end of the world?* And his answer, with respect to "the time of *his second coming and of the end of the world*, is "—*But of that day and hour knoweth no person—no—not "the Angels—but my Father only.* Dr. Clarke's note upon "this 36th verse, is, 'It is an extraordinary ingenious con- "jecture of Grotius, to make (that day) here opposed to (all "these things) ver. 34, so that the sense may be, *the destruc- "tion of Jerusalem* shall be presently. But that day, *the "last day of judgment* is known to none.' *

"Indeed, I would propose it, as a much more just divi- "sion, that the xxvth chapter of St. Matthew's Gospel should "begin, at what is now the 36th verse of the xxivth chapter. "For that would preserve a proper connection, with what is,

* The Greek is here omitted.

" at present, the beginning of the xxvth chapter; in which it " is said, *then shall the kingdom of Heaven be likened unto ten* " *virgins, &c.* And yet no period of time is assigned, when " that shall be. Whereas; if, from Matt. xxiv. 36, &c. " our Lord is speaking of *the day of judgment, and of the end* " *of the world*, it may very properly be said, *then shall the* " *kingdom of Heaven be likened unto ten virgins, &c.* *

Such is Dr. Benson's view of the meaning of the 36th and following verses; upon which, the judicious Reader, is requested to attend to the following observations. In the first place, this learned Writer, takes it for granted, that when the Disciples asked their Lord—*what should be the sign of his coming*, they meant *his second coming to judge the world* —but, the evidence which has been produced, that this enquiry related, not to *his second*, but to *his first coming* as *the Messiah*, seems to be, fully, sufficient to confute this opinion. See p. 86, 87. Secondly, it must be observed that, in St. Luke's account, the questions of the Disciples are confined, entirely, to our Lord's prediction of *the destruction of the Temple*. Chap. xxi. 7. *Master—but when shall these things be, and what sign will there be when these things shall come to pass?* Now it is highly deserving of attention, that in verses 32 and 33, our Lord asserts, in the most solemn maner, that *all these things were to happen in that generation*; which Dr. Benson has, expressly, admitted to relate to *the destruction of Jerusalem*, in St. Matthew's account, and consequently, in that of St. Luke. And yet there is a continuation of the same subject, in the following verse. *And take heed to yourselves, lest, at any time, your heart be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness and cares of this life, and so* THAT DAY *come upon you, unawares; for, as* A SNARE, *shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole Earth*—or rather, of the whole land, i. e. of the land of Judæa, as Bishop Pearce has paraphrased it.

Here it must carefully be noted, is the same expression, *that day*, and in precisely the same connection, as in the xxivth of Matthew, and the same sentiment, likewise, though somewhat differently expressed; *Of that day and hour knoweth no man*, says St Matthew. *As a snare*, Says St. Luke, *shall it come upon the land*. Hence, it should appear, that the

* See Benson on the Unity of Sense of Scripture prefixed to his Paraphrase, p. xxx. and the Bishop of Landaff's Tracts, Vol. IV. pages 501, 502.

conjecture

conjecture of Grotius, which Dr. Clarke has called, an extraordinary ingenious one, and which Dr, Benson seems to have approved of as such, is deserving of no regard.

It is very remarkable that Bishop Newton, when speaking of the 36th verse of the chapter under consideration, in the most explicit terms, acknowledges that "the consistence and "connection of the discourse oblige us to understand it, as "spoken of the time of *the destruction of Jerusalem*." This connection he states in the following very able and masterly manner. "The word in the Greek," says the Bishop, "is "of a larger signification than *hour*; and besides, it seemeth "somewhat improper to say; *Of that day and hour knoweth no* "*man*; for if *the day* was not known, certainly the hour "was not, and it was superfluous to make such an addition. "I conceive therefore that the passage should be rendered— "not—*Of that day and hour knoweth no man*—but *of that day* "*and season* knoweth no man, as the word is frequently used "in the best Authors, both sacred and prophane. It is true "our Saviour declares—*all these shall be fulfilled in this gene-* "*ration*. It is true the Prophet Daniel hath given some "intimation of the time, in his famous Prophecy of the "seventy weeks, but though this great revolution was to "happen towards the conclusion of seventy weeks—or four "hundred and ninety years, to be computed from a certain "date, that is not easy to be fixed, yet the particular day— "the particular season, in which it was to happen might "still remain a secret to men and angels: and our Saviour "had before, verse 20. advised his Disciples to pray that "their flight be not in the winter, neither on the Sab- "bath day: the day not being known, they might pray that "their flight be not on the Sabbath day: the season not being "known, they might pray that their flight might not be in "the winter. As it was in the days of Noah, saith our "Saviour, so shall it be now: as then—they were eating and "drinking—marrying and giving in marriage, till they were "surprized by the flood, notwithstanding the frequent warn- "ings and admonitions of that Preacher of righteousness; so "now, they shall be engaged in the business and pleasures of "the world, little expecting—little thinking of this univer- "sal ruin, till it come upon them, notwithstanding the "express predictions of Christ and his Disciples. *

* See Newton on the Prophecies, Vol. II. p. 314.

It

It would be difficult, if not impossible, to imagine any thing more to the purpose than what the learned Bishop has here said—but alas—how much is it to be lamented that in defiance of *the consistence and connection of the discourse*—in opposition to every principle of sound reasoning—he, immediately afterwards, asserts that, " in an higher sense, it may " be true also of the end of the world and the general judg- " ment. All the subsequent discourse too," he adds, " we " may observe doth not relate, so properly to *the destruction* " *of Jerusalem* as to *the end of the world* and *the general* " *judgment*. Our Saviour loseth sight, as it were, of his " former subject and adapts his discourse more to the " latter."

But, is not all this said, not only, without proof—but, in direct opposition to the principles of sound criticism? What evidence is there that our Saviour loseth sight of his former subject, and that he adapts his discourse more to the latter? So far is this from being the case, that in the conclusion of the quotation from him, in page 125, he expressly declares that it relates to the destruction of Jerusalem! In short, what better and more solid ground of satisfaction can be given of the meaning of any Writer, than *the consistence and connection of the discourse?* Can it, for a moment, be supposed that our Saviour should disregard these, without fixing, the most injurious imputation, upon his character—not as a divine instructor only—but, even as a man of sound understanding? Can the Scriptures be more effectually degraded, in the eyes of the intelligent and discerning part of mankind, than by such representations? What grounds of triumph, must they not, inevitably afford to the Unbeliever?

But Bishop Newton is not the only one who, to support a double meaning, has found himself obliged to make concessions which are injurious to christianity; for Mr. Thomas, in his Strictures on Dr. Edwards's Sermon, on the predictions of the Apostles, concerning *the coming of Christ*, speaking of the 36th verse of the chapter under consideration, says, " I should conclude that the prediction more immediately " relating to *the end of the world*, begins here, (though it " may be alluded to, in several other parts of the chapter), " especially if we consider the emphatic meaning of *that day* " —a phrase corresponding to *the great and remarkable day*, " compare 2 Tim. i. 12. 18. and iv. 8. To this," he says, " it

" it may be objected that what follows in the 40th and 41st " verses, cannot be admitted to belong to any prediction of the " last day. It is evident, however, that there may be a transi- " tion, in the following verse, from this prediction to that " concerning the destruction of Jerusalem. This transition " seems to be made, by the particle *but* in v. 37.

Here Mr. Thomas appears to admit, *a double transition*—first from *the destruction of Jerusalem*, to *the final judgment*, which, he supposes, to begin in the 36th verse, and then, again, from *the final judgment* to *the destruction of Jerusalem* in the 37th verse. But if this representation be true; it will be very difficult indeed to vindicate the perspicuity of the Evangelist. Mr. Thomas may perhaps reply, in the language which he has actually made use of in page 27, that " the " rule of criticism delivered in the former part of Dr. Ed- " wards's Sermon, is not much regarded here, and that it " does not appear to be necessary"—that " it seems much " more reasonable to suppose that the Evangelist wrote in the " language of nature than of critical precision," and that, " it does not appear very respectful to the great Author of " language to prescribe rules for the revelation of himself to " his creatures."

But will not the unbeliever think, and with reason, that this is little less than giving up the argument to the adversary and admitting the validity of his objection? Will he, or, indeed, ought he to be silenced by such reasoning as this? Can it be imagined, that if God condescends to reveal himself to his creatures; it would be in a language which is unintelligible to them? Or can it be admitted that the language of nature is at variance with sound criticism? *

* It is very well observed, by Dr. Benson, that " we justly condemn the " answers of the *Heathen Oracles*, as riddles; dark and obscure, vague and " indeterminate; capable of being turned many ways; without knowing " certainly which sense was intended, or in what way they are to be under- " stood. But divine prophecies should be intelligible, and have one " determinate meaning; that it may be known when and how they are ac- " complished.—We admire it as an excellence in Homer, and other cele- " brated Writers of antiquity, that their meaning is expressed clearly; and " may we not expect, when God speaks to men that his meaning should " be expressed in as clear and determinate a manner?" See Benson's Essay on the Unity of Sense of Scripture, prefixed to his Paraphrase, p. xxi. Vol. II.

When

When Mr. Thomas says that our Saviour seems to declare that "it was no part of his Mission to announce the time of "the final judgment," he says, what appears to be, strictly, true—but when he adds, that "he expressly forbids curiosity "in such enquiries," and quotes Acts i. 7. for the proof of it, he should have recollected that our Lord's declaration, in that instance, had no relation to *the day of judgment*—but to the question of the Disciples—*when he would restore the kingdom to Israel?* *

Mr. King, in his Morsels of Criticism, in commenting upon this verse, says, "we need not hesitate to affirm, that to apply "these words to *the destruction of Jerusalem*, (which was to "happen while some of the persons who heard the words were "still living) must be very strange and improper indeed; since "we know that it was our Lord's professed intention that such "of the Jews as believed and remembered his words, should be "effectually warned and should escape and save themselves by "flight, and do moreover know, that they actually did take "the warning and do so." †

This reasoning of Mr. King's, however plausible it may, at first sight appear, will not, on a close inspection, be found to have the smallest weight in it; for where, it may asked, was the strangeness or impropriety of our Lord's saying, even of that event, which he wished his Disciples to guard against, and to escape from,—*Of that day and hour knoweth no man.* They had asked him, and he had told them, very frankly and fully, what the signs and tokens of that awful catastrophe would be? They had farther asked him,—*When shall these things be?* And, to this question, he gave them a general answer, in the 34th verse, attended with the most solemn assurances, that it would be, *in that generation.* But though, by this declaration, they were fully apprized, that it would be *in that generation*, he, in the 36th verse says,—*Of that day and hour knoweth no man.* Of the precise moment, or period, when it shall happen, I have nothing to inform you—that is not necessary for your safety—you have sufficient means of escape, in the intelligence which I have, already, given you, if you make a proper use of them. I tell you, therefore, *to watch*, and for this reason, especially, because

* Of the sense of this passage more will be said hereafter.

† Morsels of Criticism, p. 274.

ye know neither the day nor the hour when it shall be. So far was this, from strangeness, or impropriety, that a better, or a more natural argument for *watchfulness*, could not possibly have been suggested, by the most sagacious reasoner; for, had they known *the precise time*, when that event was to have happened—where would have been the necessity *for watchfulness?* In that case, they would only have had to remember, *the particular time*, which he had fixed, for its accomplishment and, they would have been sufficiently prepared, for avoiding the impending danger!

But perhaps our Lord's argument cannot be stated in a more satisfactory manner, than by presenting it to the Reader, at full length, as it stands in its connection, in the chapter itself. Let it but be recollected, that the question of the Disciples, in consequence of the prediction of Jesus, that *there should not be one stone left upon another which should not be thrown down*, was—*When shall these things be?* and the connection will be abundantly apparent. Our Lord's general answer to this question is, in the 34th verse,—*This generation shall not pass away till all these things*, i. e. till all the things which he had, more particularly described, in the preceding part of that chapter, *be fulfilled*. And, to confirm the certainty of this prediction, he adds, in terms, the most energetic which language can convey, ver. 35. *Heaven and Earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away*. In this connection, our Lord immediately adds, ver. 36.—*Of that day and hour*, when these things shall happen—for that is evidently the ellipsis to be supplied, otherwise here is a relative without an antecedent—or, in plainer terms, an apparent reference to something which had been said before, * when, in reality, he was beginning a new subject, which had no relation to it: *Of*

* Some have supposed that the Evangelist is here speaking of *the day and hour when the Heavens shall pass away*, mentioned in the preceding verse—but, Bishop Newton having quoted this verse, says, "It is a common figure of "speech in the Oriental languages, to say of two things, that the one shall "be, and the other shall not be, when the meaning is only, that the one "shall happen sooner, or more easily, than the other. As in this instance "of our Saviour, *Heaven and Earth shall pass away, but my words shall not* "*pass away*—the meaning is, Heaven and Earth shall sooner or more easily "pass away than my word shall pass away; the frame of the Universe shall "sooner, or more easily be dissolved, than my words shall not be fulfilled. "And thus it is expressed by St. Luke upon a like occasion, xvi. 17. *It is* "*easier for Heaven and Earth to pass than one tittle of the law to fail.*"

that day and hour, or season, *knoweth no man—no, not the Angels of heaven—but my Father only*. In the 37th verse, the connection is carried on, with a precision which would have done honor to the closest reasoner. *Ye know*, says our Lord, *neither the day nor the hour when the Son of Man cometh*—but this know, that—*As the days of Noah were, so shall also* the nature of *the coming of the Son of Man*, the Messiah, *be*; i. e. not only suddenly, and in a moment, when they thought not of it—but, as in the time of Noah, *in clouds*—in *the destruction*—not, in *the exaltation of the Jewish Nation*.

The expression, *the coming of the Son Man*, as used in this connection, is deserving of very particular attention, as the judicious Reader will perceive that it has, a very strong tendency to confirm the common acceptation of the word *generation*, and, in short, the unity of sense of the whole chapter, as relating to *the destruction of Jerusalem*, exclusively of *the day of judgment*; for the same expression is used in a part of the chapter, where it cannot possibly have any other reference than to *the coming of the Messiah*. Ver. 26, 27. *Wherefore if they*, to wit, the false prophets, *shall say unto you—Behold he*, the Messiah, *is in the desert—go not forth—Behold he is in the secret chambers, believe it not; for, as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west, so shall also* the nature of THE COMING OF THE SON OF MAN, for perspicuity, BE. And, this is still farther explained, in the 30th verse, by *the Son of Man coming* in clouds. *They shall see the Son of Man*, the Messiah, *coming in the clouds of Heaven, with power and great glory*. If this relates to the calamities which were coming upon *the Jewish nation*, it will, with equal clearness, appear that, the same calamity is referred to, in the 37th, 38th, and 39th verses. *As the days of Noah were—so shall also* the nature of THE COMING OF THE SON OF MAN, the Messiah, BE.

The Evangelist goes on and says, ver. 40. 41, most evidently, with a reference to the calamitous times, of which he had before been speaking. *Then*, i. e. at that time, *shall two be in the field—the one shall be taken and the other left. Two women shall be grinding at the mill—the one shall be taken and the other left. Watch therefore; for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come*, i. e. ye know not the exact period when the desolation, which I have predicted, shall take place, and

therefore,

therefore, it will become you *to watch*, that you may escape its dreadful effects. The importance of *this watchfulness*, is still farther illustrated, in the stile of parable, ver. 41,42, &c. *Ye know not what hour your Lord doth come—but know this, that if the good man of the house had known, in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to have been broken open. Therefore be ye also ready, for, in such an hour as ye think not, the Son of Man*, the Messiah, *cometh*. The whole of this argument is, so evidently, an exhortation to *watchfulness*, for *the coming of the Son of Man*—or, for that period when, *the true nature of the coming of the Messiah* would be fully manifested, by *the destruction of Jerusalem*, founded upon the principle that *they knew neither the day nor the hour*, when that calamity would take place, that the inference seems to be natural and necessary, that it is *a continuation* of one and the same subject —or of our Lord's answer, to the questions of the Disciples, *When shall these things be?* in consequence of his prediction of *the total destruction of the magnificent Temple at Jerusalem*.

Were there no other evidences than what have now been laid before the Reader, that the whole of the xxivth of Matthew, and particularly the 36th and following verses, relate solely to *the destruction of Jerusalem*, exclusively of *a second coming*, and of *the end of the world*; it would now, it may be presumed, be fully sufficient to satisfy every impartial enquirer. But, besides this—there is not wanting collateral evidence, of no trifling importance, which must not be overlooked, particularly, as it will afford, a favorable opportunity of considering the true meaning of some other passages, which will be found to have, a close connection, with the main object of this work.

This collateral evidence is contained, in the xviith chapter of St. Luke;—which it is the more necessary to attend to, as it has been asserted, by Mr. Houghton, "That in this chapter "we find, almost the same expressions applied—not to the "period in which, Jerusalem should be destroyed—but to *the* "*day in which the Son of Man should be revealed*. And, that "by this revelation of the Son of Man, we are to understand "the period of *his coming to judge the world*," he says, "appears from its being introduced in the same manner, and "illustrated by the same comparisons, that are used by

" Matthew, when speaking of the day which no man " knoweth, but which is known to God only." *

As it cannot be denied that *the revelation of the Son of Man*, as recorded by St. Luke, is introduced in the same manner, and illustrated by the same comparisons, as are used by St. Matthew, when speaking of *the day which no man knoweth*, &c.—the examination of St. Luke's account, will, upon this very account, be peculiarly interesting; for if *the day when the Son of Man is revealed*, should be found to be *the day of Judgment*, as Mr. Houghton has asserted—the hypothesis of *the day which no man knoweth*—but which is *known to God only*, having an exclusive reference to *the destruction of Jerusalem*, must be abandoned, as incapable of defence.

The occasion which gave rise to the conversation between our Lord and the Pharisees is thus stated by the Evangelist, chap. xvii. 20. *And, when he was demanded of the Pharisees, when the Kingdom of God should come, he answered and said, —The Kingdom of God cometh not with observation; neither shall they say—Lo here—or lo there, for the Kingdom of God is within*, or among, *you*. †

The judicious and attentive Reader will here observe, that the language which is used, by St. Luke, is the very same with that of St. Matthew, though, perhaps, not so fully expressed, by the former, as by the latter. In St. Matthew's account, this language was, indisputably, intended as a *caution* against the arts of deceivers, when *the approaching destruction* which our Lord had predicted, would lead many to assume

* See Houghton's Sermons, page 224.

† This is one of those passages which Mr. Mede, in his first Letter to Dr. Mellish, says, " relates to *the kingdom of a thousand years*, which the " Apocalypse includes between the beginning and consummation of the great " judgment." But, if the meaning of the question of the Pharisees is to be determined by the known and acknowledged sentiments which they at that period, avowedly, entertained concerning *the* nature of the *coming of the Messiah*—there cannot possibly exist a shadow of a doubt, that this great man was mistaken, and that the Pharisees had no notion, when they put this question, but of the establishment of *the kingdom of the Messiah* in their own time. Indeed, this fact is very fully demonstrated, by our Lord's answer to their question, in the 21st and two following verses. *The kingdom of God*, says he, *cometh not with observation*, i. e. says Bishop Pearce—" The king- " dom of the Messiah—or of Christ, is not to be of that kind as ye expect, " and which has outward shew and pomp to make it observable—*neither* " *shall they say—Lo here—or lo there—for behold the kingdom of God* is among " you, though you pretend to see none of the signs of its approach." See Bishop Pearce in loc.

the

the character of the Messiah, Matt. xxiv. 23. *Then, if any man shall say unto you—Lo here is Christ—or the Messiah, or there—believe him not; for there shall arise false Christs and false Prophets.* This being the case, in St. Matthew's account, in a part of the chapter which, indisputably, relates to *the destruction of Jerusalem*; it is no less obviously so, in St. Luke's account, in the chapter under consideration; for, as has frequently been observed, in the course of this Work, both the Disciples and the Pharisees were, of one common opinion, respecting *the nature of the Messiah's character*; and, both the one and the other, at the period when this conversation took place, continued to expect *a temporal Messiah*.

To give any farther proofs that the question of the Pharisees related to *the coming of the Messiah*, would be superfluous, and unnecessarily to fatigue the Reader with repetition. * It will be much more to the purpose to compare the arguments of the two Evangelists together, where they appear to be similar, that the judicious Reader may be able to perceive, in the clearest manner, that both the one and the other describe, not *the coming of Christ to judge the world*—but *his coming as the Messiah*. And, that this may be seen to the greatest possible advantage—the two accounts are here presented to the Reader, in opposite columns.

The Questions of the Disciples. Matt. xxiv. 3.	The Question of the Pharisees. Luke xvii. 20.
When shall these things be, and what shall be the sign of thy coming?	*And he was demanded of the Pharisees when the Kingdom of God should come?*
The Answer, in St. Matthew, Ver. 27.	The Answer in St. Luke, Ver. 24.
As the lightning cometh out of the east and shineth even	*As the lightning that lighteth out of the one part under*

* Archbishop Newcome, speaking of this Prophecy, says—"It was "delivered about three months before the copious one on the same subject, "with which it co-incides." See his Observations, p. 182.

unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be.

Cautions against Deception.

Matt. xxiv. 4, 5, 23, 24.

Take heed that no man deceive you; for many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ, and shall deceive many. Then, if any man shall say unto you—Lo here is Christ—or there—believe him not; for there shall arise false Christs and false Prophets. Behold I have told you before.

The suddenness of the coming of the Son of Man.

Matt. xxiv. 37, 38.

As the days of Noah were, so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be; for as in the days which were before the flood, they were eating and drinking—marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and took them all away—so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be.

heaven, shineth out of the other part under heaven—so shall also the Son of Man be in his day. *

Cautions against Deception.

Luke xvii. 20, 21, 22.

The Kingdom of God cometh not with observation—neither shall they say—Lo here—or lo there; for behold the kingdom of God is within you: And he said unto his Disciples—The days will come when ye shall desire to see one of the days of the Son of Man, and ye shall not see it.

The suddenness of the coming of the Son of Man.

Luke xvii. 26, 27, 30.

As it was in the days of Noah, so shall it be also, in the days of the son of Man. They did eat—they drank—they married wives—they were given in marriage, until the flood came and destoyed them all. Even thus shall it be, when the Son of Man is revealed.

* Archbishop Newcome, having quoted this verse, says, "This cannot "refer to *the day of judgment*; because it stands in immediate connection "with verse 23. *And they shall say unto you—see here—or see there: go not "after them, nor follow them. For*, &c. verse 24." See his Observations, p. 254.

articular Directions how to conduct themselves when calamity should come upon them.	Particular Directions how to conduct themselves when calamity should come upon them.
Matt. xxiv. 17, 18, 40, 41.	Luke xvii. 31, 34, 35.
Let him who is on the house top not come down to take any thing out of his house; neither let him who is in the field return back to take his clothes. Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken and the other left. Two women shall be grinding at the mill—the one shall be taken and the other left.	*In that day, he who shall be upon the house top—and his stuff in the house, let him not come down to take it away. And he who is in the field—let him likewise not return back. There shall be two in one bed—the one shall be taken and the other shall be left. Two shall be grinding together—the one shall be taken and the other left. Two shall be in the field—the one shall be taken and the other left.*
General Reason for these Cautions and Directions.	General Reason for these Cautions and Directions.
Matt. xxiv. 28.	Luke xvii. 37.
For wheresoever the carcase is, there shall the Eagles be gathered together.	*Wheresoever the body * is, thither will the Eagles be gathered together.*

From the most cursory view of these two opposite columns, no doubt can well be entertained, that the subject treated of, by both the Evangelists, is one and the same. And, from a closer inspection; various interesting and important observations, very naturally arise, which seem, in the strongest manner, to confirm the reasoning, which has been adopted, in the examination of Matthew xxiv. and the parallel chap-

* As St. Matthew's expression is translated by the word *carcase*, which is more particularly descriptive of the dead than the word *body*; it would perhaps have been better to have translated that of St. Luke, which indisputably was intended to signify the same thing, by the same word.

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ters of Mark and Luke; which will, at the same time, very fully prove, how much those Writers have mistaken the design of those chapters, who have referred them, to any other event, than to *the destruction of Jerusalem*, and to the full manifestation, by that awful event, of *the true nature of the Messiah's character*, as opposed to his being *a temporal Prince*, who was to raise the Jews to a state of unexampled prosperity.

The first observation, which naturally arises, from this comparison of the two chapters is, that both the Disciples of Jesus and the Pharisees, *being Jews*, and having the same sentiments—the same prejudices, and the same expectations, concerning *the nature of the Messiah's character*—their enquiries, very naturally, turned upon the same subject; which, as naturally, in both cases, led our Lord to inform them of their mistake and to *caution them against deceivers*, who should assume *the character of the Messiah*—or who should point out others as sustaining it. Both the questions of the Disciples and that of the Pharisees and the general answer of Jesus, in both cases, together with the cautions, which he gave them, to *beware of deceivers*, are so nearly similar to each other, that they cannot, easily, be mistaken. And, where there is *an apparent difference*, in the two Evangelists—that difference is more, in the language, than in the sense. Thus, when St. Luke says, *they should desire to see one of the days of the Son of Man*—what was it, but this very desire—this expectation, which would induce *the false Christs and false Prophets*, mentioned by St. Matthew, to arise and to say—*Lo here—or lo there*, is the person, whom you are so anxiously expecting!

A second observation, which arises from an attentive view of this comparison is, that the *coming of the Son of Man*,—*the day when the Son of Man should be revealed*, and the *seeing one of the days of the Son of Man*, are phrases, which appear to be only different forms of expression, signifying *the coming of the Mesiah*. Thus St. Luke, in mentioning the state of things, in *the time of Noah*, and in making his application to the time of our Saviour, says—*so shall it be in the days of the Son of Man*—but in illustrating the same subject, from the state of things in *the time of Lot*—the Evangelist changes the form of the expression, and instead of saying, as he had done, in the case of *Noah*—*so shall it be, in the days of the Son*

Son of Man—he says—*Even thus shall it be when the Son of Man is revealed.* * Now, what better evidence can possibly be desired, to shew that these different forms of expression, are synonymous, and that they plainly intimate that *the destruction of Jerusalem* would, in the fullest manner, demonstrate to them, how much they had mistaken, the *true nature of the Messiah's character* in supposing, that he would be *a temporal Prince*, who should raise them to an high degree of worldly prosperity. St. Matthew, the attentive Reader will observe, adheres to one mode of expression. *As the days of Noah were—so shall the* true nature of the *coming of the Son of Man*, the Messiah, *be.*

It must, however, be carefully observed that some of the expressions which are made use of, in St. Luke's account, must be understood differently, according to the different views, which the Disciples and the Pharisees, on the one hand, and our Lord, on the other, entertained concerning *the nature of the coming of the Messiah.* In the sense in which the Pharisees, in St. Luke, understood *the nature of the coming of the Messiah*, Jesus told them, that *the kingdom of God would not come with observation*, probably meaning, by that expression, that it would not come with those appearances of worldly splendor which would portend great national prosperity. † In the same sense, he seems to have told them that *they should desire to see one of the days of the Son of Man, but should not see it.* Upon the other hand, in

* "Our Lord," says Archbishop Newcome, "describes *the destruction* "*of Jerusalem*, when he says, Luke xvii. 30. *Even thus shall it be in the day* "*when the Son of Man is revealed.* This is plain from what follows, verses "31, 34, 35, 36. and therefore the close of verse 26, refers to *the destruction* "*of Jerusalem: and as it was in the days of Noah—so shall it be also, in the* "*days of the Son of Man.* For the same event is compared to the days of "Noah, and to the days of Lot." See Archbishop Newcome's Observations upon our Lord's conduct as a divine instructor, page 254.

† Dr. Lardner, in his Sermon on Jesus *the Son of Man*, has observed, "that Luke xvii. 22. are owing to an enquiry concerning the time of the "manifestation of *the kingdom of the Messiah;* accompanied, it is likely, "with indications of their prevailing prejudice concerning its worldly "nature. Verse 20. *And when he was demanded of the Pharisees, when the* "*kingdom of God should come;* he answered them and said—*The kingdom of* "*God cometh not with observation:* or with the outward pomp and splendour, "visible in earthly kingdoms, exciting wonder and surprize, attracting the "eyes, and pleasing the passions of carnal and worldly people." See Lardner's Sermons, Vol. II. pages 152, 153.

that the beginning of chap. xxv. is closely united with the former by the particle *then*, and that the 14th verse is firmly connected with the beginning by the particle *for*.

To trace this connection more fully, and to endeavour to ascertain, with precision, the true meaning of chap. xxv. cannot, it may be presumed, but be an object of considerable importance, and well worthy of the judicious Reader's attention, more especially as the learned University Preacher has animadverted with uncommon severity upon the labors of an eminent Prelate, upon this chapter; for, having in the manner just related, established the connection of the two chapters, he adds, "Should the most subtle and inventive "genius endeavour to accommodate the remaining portion to "any other event, than the great day of retribution, he will "soon perceive the rashness of his undertaking: but that I "may spare him the trouble of making the experiment, I "would advise him to peruse, if his patience will suffer him, "the frigid and inanimate glosses of that most tasteless critic, "Bishop Pearce." *

The critical abilities of this learned Prelate every one must decide upon, as his judgment shall direct him—but tasteless and inanimate as his glosses were, he appears to have possessed sufficient to distinguish with accuracy, what the learned University Preacher has asserted to be utterly groundless—sufficient to discern that our Lord did not foretel *his second and glorious coming*, in that generation—sufficient, in a word, to render him a very respectable authority as a Commentator, in many very important instances; though perhaps in some, and particularly in the instance here alluded to, he may not have been so happy in his interpretation. †

But to proceed: The connection of the two chapters, it must be observed, is extremely evident, not only from the use of the particles *then* and *for*, in the first and fourteenth verses, as remarked by the learned University Preacher—but

* See Edwards's Sermon on the Predictions of the Apostles, pages 24, 25.

† The Reader who has attended to what has been said, in the course of this work, will not suspect that what is here said, is meant to depreciate the critical abilities of the learned University Preacher--very far from it; for his Compend of the xxivth of Matthew, repeated at large, in pages 91, 92, and his excellent rule of Criticism, given in page 112, are strong proofs, among many others, of his skill in this respect—but he is by no means free from defects, and therefore should have been less severe upon others, especially upon one who, in his day, was esteemed among *the first of Critics*.

from

day and hour there mentioned, has a direct and exclusive relation and to the things which were to happen *in that generation*, in answer to the questions of the Disciples—*When shall these things be and what shall be the sign of thy coming?* THAT, to them, would be *a true sign*, how much they had mistaken *the nature of the Messiah's character*. When to this it be added, that the whole connection of the preceding and subsequent parts of the chapter, necessarily requires it to be so applied, and that to apply it, to any other distant and remote event, would be to violate all the rules of language and of sound reasoning; it may be fairly concluded that this, and this only, can be *the true meaning*, of that much controverted passage; for as the learned University Preacher, has very justly observed, "To suppose that, at the 36th verse, "the day of judgment is introduced as a period distinct from "the subversion of the Jewish polity, is to suppose, either "that our Saviour prophecied—or that the Evangelist wrote "without any regard to propriety or connection." *

It must afford singular satisfaction to the judicious and attentive Reader, to have the suffrage of so able a judge and so diligent an enquirer as Archbishop Newcome, upon this interesting subject; for, besides what has been already quoted from him, he says, "There can be no doubt but that Luke, "chap. xvii. 22—37. refers to *the destruction of Jerusalem*. "Observe verses 31, 34, 35, 36, 37. and compare verse 31. "with Matt. xxiv. 17, 18. and with Mark xiii. 15, 16. There"fore, Matt. xxiv. 37—41, which is parallel throughout to "this passage of St. Luke, refers likewise to that event. After"wards St. Matthew continues the same subject, as appears "from comparing chap. xxiv. 42. chap. xxv. 1, 13, 14. "and thus," the Archbishop observes, "all the accounts "of the destruction of the Jews harmonize exactly." †

After this long and laborious, but it is hoped, not uninteresting examination of Matthew xxiv. it would have been unnecessary to say any thing farther upon it, if its evident connection with the following chapter had not rendered it indispensible. This connection has not escaped the notice of the learned University Preacher; for he has observed,

* See Edwards's [illegible], page 29.

† See the Notes at the end of Archbishop Newcome's Harmony, Sect. 118, 119. p. 38.

that

know neither the day nor the hour, wherein the Son of Man cometh.

When it is considered that the whole of the long discourse, in the xxivth chapter, was delivered only four days, prior to our Lord's Crucifixion, and in consequence of the enquiry of the Disciples, when, as *the Messiah*, he should *come* and establish *his kingdom*—that he assured them, verse 33, 34, that *his kingdom would come, in that generation*—that he connected the full manifestation of *the nature of his coming* with *the destruction of Jerusalem*, and that this awful event would fully demonstrate, that *the kingdom*, which they so earnestly expected, was not *a temporal*—but *a spiritual kingdom*, and particularly that he directed them to be in a constant state of *watchfulness*, for these important and interesting events—when all these things are fully and impartially considered; it will, perhaps, appear, by no means improbable, or unnatural to suppose that our Lord, in the parable which immediately follows, intended to direct his disciples to pay particular attention to the importance of *the new situation*, in which they would *then* be placed, in a moral and religious view, rather than to *those temporal and worldly objects* which they had, *till then*, so constantly connected with *the coming of the Messiah*, and particularly as they would be answerable for the improvement or neglect of the advantages, which that *new situation* would afford them. V. 14. *For he*, to wit, *the Son of Man, is as a man travelling into a far country, who called his own servants and delivered unto them his goods. And unto one he gave five talents—to another two, and to another one—to every man according to his several*, or particular *abilities, and immediately took his journey.*

The judicious Reader can scarcely entertain a doubt, that in this parable—a resemblance is asserted between *a Traveller* and *the Son of Man*—but for what purpose is this comparison instituted, if not to shew that the resemblance was a striking one? And this, it will appear to be, in these three respects, —first, in *his departure* into a farcountry—or his Ascension into Heaven; for there does not appear to be any part of his history, in which this resemblance can be traced, but that, Secondly, in *his return*, after a long absence—or at some far distant period, viz. from *Heaven*; agreeable to the prophetic declaration of the Angels after his Ascension, Acts i. 11. *This same Jesus, who is taken up from you into Heaven, shall*

shall so come, in like manner, as ye have seen him go into Heaven. And thirdly, in his reckoning with *his own Servants*, as the Traveller is represented to have done with *his*—or, in other words, in his calling all men to an account for their conduct, during his absence.

Upon all these accounts—the analogy between our Lord and the Traveller, appears to be very striking, and the parable seems to have been admirably fitted to the great purposes which Jesus, throughout his whole ministry, appears to have had, more immediately in view, namely, to unfold to them the various events which were to happen, as they were able to bear them—to correct, in the most gradual and gentle maner, the prejudices of his Disciples, concerning *the nature of the Messiah's kingdom*, and by these means to draw their attention to *his coming* under *the character of the Messiah*—not as they imagined, as the founder of a mighty temporal kingdom—but, of *a kingdom of righteousness*—a moral and religious system, which was to train them to virtue and goodness, and to fit them for a state of immortal happiness in a future world.

After having stated, *thus generally*, the similitude between our Lord and the Traveller, in their going into a distant country—in their return after a long absence, and in their taking an account of their Servants—the first part of the parable appears to represent the resemblance that the Traveller's conduct bore to that of our Lord, in the distribution of various talents to his Servants—to one five—to another two, and to another one, according to the abilities, which each of them possessed. And having thus settled his domestic concerns, like a wise and prudent master, and given them their directions and a strict injunction to improve their talents—or as the Evangelist expresses it—to occupy—to trade with—to make a good use of, and to improve, in the best manner they were able, till his return, *he straight way took his Journey.*

When the Traveller, after a long absence, had fulfilled the purposes of his journey—he, on his return, is represented, as calling together *his Servants*, to know how they had, each of them, improved the talents which had been committed to their trust. The result of the enquiry was such, as is observable in common life, and is agreeable to the rules of equity—that each should be rewarded, according to their respective improvements

provements—while *the slothful Servant*—the man who had made no use of his talent, was justly punished, for not having turned, what had been committed to his trust, to any advantage.

Such was the reckoning and its consequences, of the Traveller, with *his own Servants*; which it must be observed, appears to have turned wholly upon the principles of *worldly interest*; not however without a strict regard to the rules of equity; for it was *the slothful Servant* only—he who had made no use of his talent, who was punished, and that because *he was slothful*.

To the Traveller's reckoning with his own Servants, appears to have been contrasted, that which our Lord is represented as making with *his Servants*; which, upon the very face of it, seems to have been conducted, upon very different principles; the enquiry turning, upon improvements of a very different nature, viz. upon the good they had done, and the sufferings they had alleviated or removed; for it not only immediately follows that of the Traveller, but appears to have, a close and intimate connection, with the beginning of the Parable, verse 14. *For he*, to wit, THE SON OF MAN, *is as a man travelling into a far country*, &c. verse 31. *But when the Son of Man shall come*, viz. from Heaven, *in his glory, and all the holy Angels with him—then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory, and before him shall be gathered all nations*.

Such is the great out-line which is here offered to the Reader's attention—of the great object of *the Parable of the Traveller*, from the 13th verse to the 31st, and, of what seems to be its application—or rather, of *its contrast*, from thence to the close of the chapter, which in this view, may be considered as constituting—not *two* Parables—but *one* only; the former part representing *the conduct of the Traveller*, between whom and *the Son of Man*, the resemblance is affirmed, and the latter, that of *the Son of Man*, when he shall return from Heaven, *in his glory, with his holy Angels*. It is the province of the judicious Reader to give it a candid and impartial consideration. If it is, in itself, deserving of attention, it will probably not be less so, on account of its simplicity, and of its quadrating, so exactly, with that gentle and easy manner of communicating divine truth, which so remarkably distinguished our Lord's discourses, from those of all other Men, and

and of which, some very striking instances have been given, in the course of this work. And, it may be added that, in no period of our Lord's Ministry could he, with so much propriety, have communicated to his Disciples, the intelligence of his removal from them, and the importance of the situation which they would then hold, as *the Subjects of that Kingdom*, which it was the great object of his mission to establish. If it should appear to be defective—it is the Reader's province to examine whether the defect is in the representation here given—or in the interpretation itself;—if the former, it may be corrected by abler hands;—if the latter, it would afford the Author real pleasure to discard it for a better.

From this long, but it hoped, not uninteresting examination, of the xxivth and xxvth chapters of St. Matthew, the Reader's attention, is now requested to the concluding scene of the Life of Jesus, when he was arraigned before the great Council of the Jewish Nation as *an Impostor*, who had assumed the great and important character of *the Messiah*, without possessing any of those characteristic marks of *the Messiahship*, which they had, one and all, invariably affixed to it.

It hath been one principal object, in the course of this work, to present the Christian records to the Reader's attention, as *an History*, and particularly as *an History* of the peculiar prejudices and sentiments of *the Jews*, with respect to *the nature of the Messiah's character*. And, from the view which hath been given, of the conduct of the Disciples; it appears, with an evidence which is not to be resisted, that during his life, they did not renounce *the pleasing hope* that he would, at a proper time, manifest himself as their *temporal deliverer*, and that they were thoroughly satisfied, not only that he was *an extraordinary personage*—but that he was *the Messiah*, though they were *then* unable to reconcile the various events which he had disclosed to them, with his sustaining that character.

The Jewish Rulers, on the contrary, finding that Jesus did not give them any encouragement to expect him as *a temporal Prince*, but, that he had denounced nothing but *ruin and desolation* as awaiting them, and dreading, perhaps, the consequences of their suffering him to remain, any longer, unmolested, determined to put him to death as *an Impostor*, as not answering, as they imagined, in the most essential and

important respects, to their ideas of *the nature of the Messiah's character*; regardless of all other Proofs which, in the course of his Ministry, had been displayed of his being *a person sent from God*.

It cannot be denied that *this historical fact*, of the arraignment and trial of Jesus, as *an Impostor*, for assuming *the character of the Messiah*, perfectly harmonizes with *the general tenor of the History*, and, very naturally, arose from *the erroneous ideas*, which the Jews had, all along, held concerning *the nature of the Messiah's character*. And though it affords an awful and affecting example, of the amazing power of prejudice, and of the dreadful influence which an inordinate love of this world has, in counteracting the strongest evidence; yet this ought not to lessen *the credibility of the narration*: for the instances which occur, in common life, of the power of prejudice, are found to be very frequent, even among whole nations, and to surmount, if not the evidence of *a miracle*, such at least, as might naturally have been supposed, fully sufficient to have produced conviction; especially when that conviction, as in *the case of the Jews*, is opposed by views of worldly interest. *

But,

* To the question—"What motives could the Jews have to wish the "Gospel might be false, and to shut their eyes against the light with so "much obstinacy and perseverance?" Dr. Beattie answers—"Motives they "had of the most cogent nature; motives, which among any people it might "be difficult to prevail against; but which from the inherent perverseness of "the Jewish nation, could hardly fail to derive insurmountable strength. "For first, if the Jewish Rulers, after the death of our Lord, had acknowledged him to be the Messiah, they must also have acknowledged themselves the perpetrators of the most dreadful crime that ever disgraced a "nation; and these Rulers so haughty, a confession so humiliating could "hardly be looked for. Nor secondly, was it to be expected, that they "could bear to think of the abrogation of the law of Moses which "had subsisted so long; which did so much honour to their nation, "Temple, and capital city; which taught them to consider themselves as "God's peculiar people; and from which their Priests, Scribes, and "Elders, who we find were the most inveterate enemies of the new religion, derived so many dignities and emoluments. They might also, "thirdly, from many political considerations, be unwilling to receive the "Gospel, and inclined to look on the man who taught it, as the enemies "of their country. For if the Messiah was now come, then all their flattering hopes of a glorious conqueror, who should rescue them from the "Roman yoke, and exalt them above all nations, were at an end for ever. "In a word; if it be in the power of prejudice, of pride, of ambition, of "religious zeal, or of national partiality, to make men averse to the recep-

"tion

But, however difficult it may be to account for the conduct of *the Jews, as a Nation*, the fact is indisputable, as related by all the Evangelists, that they did arraign Jesus as *an Impostor*, for assuming *the character of the Messiah*. The conduct of *the Jewish Rulers*, as well as that of our Lord, upon this truly awful and affecting occasion, will be well deserving of an attentive consideration, more particularly as it will tend, in the strongest manner, to corroborate *the propriety* of the manner, in which the latter found it necessary to conduct himself, throughout the whole course of his ministry; and, as it will enable the judicious Reader to ascertain, with the utmost precision, the meaning of a passage which is, more immediately connected with the great design of this work; and that, in a connection which cannot easily be mistaken.

As Jesus was arraigned as *an Impostor*, for assuming *the character of the Messiah*, it was absolutely necessary, according to the usual forms, in judicial proceedings, to prove *the fact*, that he had *claimed that character*. And, the manner in which the Jews conducted themselves, in order to ascertain *this fact*, demonstrates *the wisdom and the prudence*, of our Lord's conduct, as narrated in the preceding History, in not declaring himself to be *the Messiah*, and shews, in the most striking point of view, *the extreme propriety* and, even *the necessity*, of the language, which he did adopt; for it appears that, notwithstanding their wicked artifices to obtain the necessary evidence of *this important fact*: they were constrained to apply to Jesus, that, if possible, they might extort from him the confession, that he was *the Messiah*, though in direct violation of a fundamental maxim in judicial proceedings, that a man should not be obliged to convict himself. When the witnesses who appeared against him, had delivered their evidence, such as it was, the High Priest, addressing

" tion of any system of opinions, we need not wonder at the obstinacy of " the Jewish Rulers. Their passions, generally violent, were all in arms, " and in the highest degree exasperated, against Christ and his religion. " That so many of that nation should have been his Disciples, is therefore " more wonderful than that so many should have opposed him. In mo- " dern times it cannot apparently be the interest of any, hardened sinners " excepted, that the Gospel should not be true. Yet even in these days, " and in the most enlightened nations, a spirit of opposition to the Gospel, " and a want of candour with regard to its doctrines and evidence, are by " no means uncommon." See Beattie's Evidences of the Christian Religion, pages 68, 69, 70, 73, 74. Vol. I.

our Lord, asked him, what he had to say in his defence? Matt. xxvi. 62. *Answerest thou nothing? What is it which these witness against thee? But Jesus*, according to the expressive language of the Evangelist, *held his peace.* The High Priest then, conscious of the deficiency of the evidence of the fact, which he wished to establish, and finding that Jesus made no reply to his question, said to him again,—*I adjure thee by the living God that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ*—or the Messiah, *the Son of the living God.*

Although our Lord well knew the consequences of an acknowledgement that he was *the Messiah;* yet, being thus solemnly adjured, as to *the nature of the character* which he sustained; and having given the most unequivocal proofs in the miracles which he had wrought, and in the important instructions which he had from time to time communicated to them upon the subject; he, with great and becoming dignity replied, —*Thou hast said*,—or as it is in Mark, chap. xiv. 62. *I am*, i. e. I am *the Christ*—or the Messiah—to which he immediately added, *Nevertheless I say unto you, hereafter*, or as the original here, and in Luke xxii. 69. properly signify, *from this time, shall ye see the Son of Man*—the Messiah, *sitting on the right hand of power, and coming*, not as you vainly imagine, with worldly pomp and splendor, to indulge your aspiring and ambitious views—but *in the clouds of heaven.* As if he had said—The calamities which I have foretold, under the expression of *coming in the clouds of Heaven*, will soon begin to take place; which will very fully demonstrate, how much you have mistaken *the true nature of the Messiah's character.* St. Luke says, that this declaration, on the part of Jesus, produced another question, from the Jewish Rulers, chap xxii. 70. *Then said they all,—Art thou then the Son of God?* i. e. Art thou *the Messiah?* plainly intimating, in what sense, they understood his assertion, that they *should see him coming in the clouds of Heaven, and sitting on the right hand of power*—or as it is in St. Luke, chap. xxii. 69—*of the power of God.*

This answer of our Lord to the questions of the Jewish Rulers—the judicious Reader is requested, particularly, to observe, is similar to that language which he had before made use of in describing the awful calamities which were coming upon the Jews, as a Nation, Matt. xxiv. 30. *They shall see the Son of Man*, the Messiah, *coming in the clouds of Heaven with power and great glory.* In examining the meaning of

that

that passage; it was observed, that this language was borrowed from the Prophecy of Daniel, when confessedly describing *the coming of the Messiah*; and, that the constant signification of the phrase, *coming in clouds*—or *in the clouds of Heaven*, in the language of Prophecy is—*the execution of Judgments*. But, whatever obscurity may have been supposed to exist, in Matt. xxiv. 30. in consequence of its connection, either with the preceding—or the subsequent context—that obscurity cannot, in the present instance, possibly exist, for no one can entertain a doubt that the enquiry of *the Jewish Rulers*, upon this interesting and important occasion, related to *the coming of the Messiah*—or whether Jesus actually did profess *to sustain that character*, as he, most evidently, was arraigned, for assuming it *falsely*.* If therefore, there is any connection, between the question of *the Jewish High Priest* and the reply which our Lord made to it—if a person's meaning can be collected, from the situation and circumstances of things, at the time when he spoke these words—the meaning of Jesus could be no other than this—that though he was now, in the hands of his enemies, degraded—contemned—and reviled, as a notorious Malefactor and Impostor, for assuming *the character of the Messiah*; yet that the claim which he had now, in the most public manner, made to it, was justly founded—and as a proof that it was so, and that they had totally mistaken *its true nature*—they

* Dr. Macknight very properly observes, "that our Lord applied the "prophecy of Daniel, explicitly to himself, when the High Priest, in the "course of his trial, asked him if he was *the Christ*—or *the Messiah*; for, "having answered that he was, he added, out of Daniel's Vision, which, "by all was understood to prefigure *the coming of the Messiah in his kingdom*. "Mark xiv. 62. *And ye shall see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of "power and coming in the clouds of Heaven*. He applied this prophecy to "himself likewise a few days before his Transfiguration, Matt. xvi. 28. "*Verily I say unto you,—there be some here which shall not taste of death till they "see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom*. He applied it to himself, in his "prophecy concerning *the destruction of Jerusalem*, and by introducing it "there, he shewed what particular event was meant in the Vision, by *the Son "of Man's coming* IN THE CLOUDS OF HEAVEN, Matt. xxiv. 30. *And they shall "see the Son of Man coming in* THE CLOUDS OF HEAVEN, *with power and "great glory*. He gave the same explication of this part of the Vision, Luke "xvii. 30. where he calls *the time of the destruction of Jerusalem—the day "when the Son of Man is revealed*—or pointed out, by this event, to be *the "Son of Man*, in Daniel's Vision." See Macknight's Truth of the Gospel History, page 101. And for the sentiments of Bishop Chandler and Dr. Benson upon this subject, See page 109.

should

should see the Son of Man, the Messiah, *coming*, not in the manner, in which they had expected him to come—but *in the clouds of Heaven*—and that the vengeance which they had *falsely* imagined, was to be inflicted, upon their enemies, would be executed upon themselves. Such a declaration as this, must have been, a very severe and cutting one to them, as it struck at the root of all their dearest hopes and expectations! It was, as if he had said—"You have been looking "and longing, with the utmost ardor and impatience, for a "person, under *the character of your Messiah*, who should "raise you to the highest distinction and pre-eminence among "the nations of the earth, and to render you prosperous and "successful, beyond the example of all former times. You "expect all the sensual gratifications, which power or "wealth can bestow—but these expectations will, most as-"suredly, be frustrated: for though I, who have, in express "terms, asserted my claim to *the character of the Messiah*, "am now your prisoner, and the object of your utter con-"tempt and derision—though I am, as one of your own "prophets foretold of me, *despised and rejected by you—a* "*man of sorrows and acquainted with grief*—though in short, "you see, in me, none of *the characteristic marks of the* "*Messiah* which you expected, and on that account, are "about to put me to a cruel and ignominious death, as *an* "*Impostor*—yet, you shall soon see how much you have "been deceived—*you shall see the Son of Man*, the Messiah, "*sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in* THE "CLOUDS OF HEAVEN. *

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* This is one of the passages which Mr. Mede has referred to *the second coming of Christ*, and on which, he says, the Church hath always grounded her faith of that article. But from what hath been here advanced—there appears to be the most satisfactory evidence that it relates, *solely*, to the controversy which subsisted between Jesus and the Jews concerning *the nature of the coming of the Messiah*—the latter expecting that he would be *a temporal Prince*, to deliver them from the Roman yoke and raise them to the highest pitch of worldly glory—the former asserting that *his coming* would be, *in clouds*—or, in vengeance upon them. The Evangelists, it might have been imagined, had sufficiently guarded their Readers against misunderstanding them, not only, by the particular connection and occasion, in which the passage, in question, is introduced; but, by the use of the word, *hereafter;* which in the original, both here and in Luke xxii. 69. properly signifies—*from the present time;* which necessarily confines the meaning of our Lord's declaration to the age in which he lived. Of what use is language, if such precision is to be disregarded?

This

The effect which this declaration of our Lord had, upon the minds *of the Jewish Rulers*, is an unequivocal proof, in what sense they understood it; for, as was naturally to be expected, from men of their turn of mind, upon such an occasion—their resentment was *instantaneous*, and their rage against him, was immediately raised to the highest pitch of fury. *Then*, says the Evangelist, Matt. xxvi. 65. *the High Priest rent his clothes, saying—He hath spoken blasphemy—what farther need have we of witnesses*, of his being an Impostor? *Behold now—ye have heard his Blasphemy—What think ye? They answered, He is guilty*, of a crime, which by the Jewish Law, is deserving *of death. Then did they spit in his face and buffetted him, and others smote him with the palms of their hands, saying, prophecy unto us, thou Christ* —thou that pretendest to be THE MESSIAH—*Who is he that smote thee?* What greater proofs of rage and indignation could they possibly have discovered—or how, in a stronger and more forcible manner, have expressed the extreme grief

This learned Writer has, however, in his Letter to Dr. Twiss, upon the Call of the Gentiles, pages 433, 434. very strongly felt the difficulty of his own Interpretation; for, having quoted the 30th verse, he says—"Here I find a "rub, which I cannot get over: for this *appearing of the signe of the Son of Man* "*in Heaven*, as well as his *coming in the clouds with great glory*, is said to be "*immediately after that tribulation of these dayes*; that is, (as I am wont to "expound it), soon after the long tribulation of the Jewish nation shall be "ended. But their tribulation shall not end till they be converted. There- "fore their conversion must needs precede *the signe of the Son of Man in* "*Heaven* there mentioned. Here I stick." Such a rub as this, is of itself, sufficient to destroy his whole hypothesis!

The present Bishop of London, in his Lectures on the Gospel of St. Matthew, recently published, speaking upon this adjuration of our Lord, says, "Jesus "now conceived himself bound in conscience to break his silence, and said "to the High Priest, *Thou hast said*; that is, thou hast said what is true, *I am* the "Messiah, the Christ, the Son of God; for all these were synonimous terms "among the Jews. But as our Lord's actual appearance and situation did "but ill accord with a character of such high dignity, he proceeds to assure "his judges, that what he affirmed was nevertheless unquestionably true; "and that they themselves should, in due time, have the fullest proof of it. "*For*, says he, *hereafter ye shall see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand* "*of power, and coming in the clouds of Heaven*. Sitting at the right hand of "power, means sitting at the right hand of God, to whom the Jews some- "times give the appellation of *power*; and *coming in the clouds of heaven*, was "with the Jews a characteristic mark, of the Messiah. And the whole passage "relates not to the final judgment, but to the coming of Christ to execute "vengeance on the Jews, in the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans." See Bishop Porteus's Lectures, Vol. II. pages 227, 228.

which

which the very idea of the disappointment of *their worldly views*, produced upon their minds? *He hath spoken blasphemy —It is not fit that he should live! Away with him—Crucify him—Crucify him*, was the universal cry. *Not this man, but Barabbas!* No crime, in their estimation, could equal that, which deprived them of hopes and prospects, so dear to their hearts, and so flattering to their pride, and which presented to their view, nothing but scenes of horror and desolation, of misery and ruin. No wonder that, in such circumstances, they should pursue him with the most unrelenting malice, and that nothing could possible satiate it but his blood!

When the Jewish Rulers had accomplished their iniquitous purpose, by putting Jesus to *an ignominious and cruel death*—they thought they had completely proved him to be, *an Impostor*, and had most effectually destroyed his pretensions to *the character of the Messiah*. Even his own Disciples—the constant companions of his ministry—the very men who had received *a commission* to announce *the approach of the Messiah's Kingdom*, shewed, as was naturally to be expected, in such trying circumstances, no small anxiety, at a fate so disastrous, and, as they seem to have imagined, so fatal to their hopes. *We trusted*, said they, *that it had been he who should have redeemed Israel*—who should have rescued us from our present degraded and dependant situation, under the yoke of the Romans, and have raised us, as *a Nation*, to the highest pitch of worldly prosperity and grandeur!

In the midst of such distressing apprehensions, and such gloomy prospects—one only hope remained, and that, as they seem to have imagined, almost *a forlorn hope*. After having related, in concise terms, the melancholy catastrophe to one, whom they supposed to be *a stranger*, they declared, in the words just cited, their confidence that he was the person whom they expected *would have redeemed Israel*—But, said they—besides all this, *this is the third day*—the day in which he said he should rise again. No language could have more strongly expressed the extreme anxiety, and the painful solicitude of the Disciples, with respect to the issue of an attachment, which a very few hours more, were to produce—which were to decide the very important, and to them, more particularly—*the interesting question*, whether, in the person of Jesus, they had been following *the true Messiah*, or *an Impostor!*

The

The triumph of the enemies of Jesus, however, was but of short duration. He had foretold that *he should rise again from the dead*, and he had limited the period, within which, it should be accomplished. This prediction being verified—the malice of the Jews was effectually defeated, and *the truth and integrity of the character*, which he had claimed, was, in the fullest manner, confirmed. The Disciples *now* no longer doubted—they no longer could doubt, that Jesus was *the Messiah*. But, as they still continued to retain their *original prejudices* that *the Messiah's kingdom* was to be *a temporal one*—hope, very naturally, revived in their minds, and the dying sparks of ambition, rekindled in their bosoms; which, presently afterwards, glowed with uncommon warmth—and no wonder, since, by such an astonishing display of the divine power, in *the Resurrection of Jesus*, they might well imagine, that Jesus had nothing now to do, but to declare himself, as *the Messiah*, and that all opposition to his claims *as such*, would immediately cease, and their most sanguine expectations be gratified, to the utmost extent of their wishes. This seems, in reality, to have been the case; for, it is *a remarkable historical fact*, that no sooner were *the first emotions* of surprize and astonishment, which naturally arose, from the wonderful event of *his Resurrection*, subsided, than they immediately asked him, though, with the utmost reverence and respect, saying, *Lord—wilt thou, at this time, restore the Kingdom to Israel?* In the honest simplicity of their hearts, they appear to have imagined, that their fellow countrymen would *now* be ready to join them, in promoting the establishment of his claims, and that the highest object of their ambition would soon be gratified!

It is extremely probable that the Disciples of Jesus were, at this moment, fortified in this idea, from a recollection of what Jesus, in the course of his ministry, had told them, viz. that they *should not have gone over the cities of Israel, till the Son of Man*, the Messiah, *came*—and that *there were then some standing among them who should not taste of death till they saw* THE KINGDOM OF GOD *come with power*. And, now, that they saw such glorious display of this power, in *his Resurrection from the dead*, they imagined, and surely, not without reason, as they most certainly did, from *their own prejudices* was the time, when he would, *openly*, declare himself *Messiah*, by giving them the expected

expected deliverance, from their enemies, and raising them to that envied state of independence to which they had, so long and so ardently aspired!

As this extraordinary display of divine power, in *the Resurrection of Jesus from the dead*, could not have failed to make an impression upon the minds of the Disciples, sufficient to counteract the influence, which *his Condemnation and Crucifixion*, had a natural tendency to produce; it was evidently no longer necessary for Jesus to use that caution which he had, hitherto, observed, in answering their enquiries, concerning *the time when* he should appear in *the character of the Messiah*. He did not, now, therefore give them any assurances of *his coming*, within any given period. On the contrary, he told them, *it was not for them to know* THE TIMES AND THE SEASONS; *which*, says he, *the Father hath put in his own power*.

This answer of our Lord, appears to have been, at least, *an indirect reproof*, of the worldly mindedness of the Disciples, and of their extreme backwardness, in comprehending *the great design of his coming as the Messiah*. And it is, as if he had said, "Have, both you and myself, been the objects of the most malevolent persecutions, which as you "have just seen, have terminated, in putting me to a cruel "and ignominious death? Have I told you, in the most "distinct and explicit terms, that for the extreme wickedness of your countrymen—their utter ruin is approaching, "and do you still continue to cherish the hope of their liberation, and of the restoration of your country to the utmost "degree of splendor and magnificence? Are you so inattentive to the language of your own Prophets, as well "as to my declarations? *O fools and slow of heart, to "believe all that the Prophets have spoken!*"

Such appears to have been, the *indirect reproof* of the worldly views of the Disciples, conveyed in our Lord's answer to their question—*When wilt thou restore the kingdom to Israel?* But still, he seems not to have lost sight of his usual condescension to their prejudices; for, even at this late period, he does not tell them, that no such Kingdom, as they expected, would be set up. He only tells them, that *it was not for them to know the times and the seasons, which the Father had put in his own power;* which appears to be equivalent to his former declaration, Matt. xxiv. 36. *Of that day*

*day and hour knoweth no man, &c. but my Father only.** But, that they might not be discouraged by their not receiving an explicit and satisfactory answer to their question—our Lord immediately adds—*But ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you, and ye shall be witnesses unto me, both in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth.* In the parallel passage in St. Luke, chap. xxiv. 49. it is said,—*Behold I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the City of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high.*

It seems highly probable, that the Disciples understood this *promise of the Father*, of *the restoration of the kingdom to Israel:* for so deeply rooted were the prejudices which they had imbibed, concerning *the nature of the Messiah's Kingdom*, that no trace appears of their being entirely eradicated, while our Lord remained upon earth! His entire removal, of which they were soon after the eye witnesses, and the subsequent effusion of the Holy Spirit, seem *alone* completely to have rectified their error, and to have removed that mist from before their eyes which had so long prevented them from perceiving *the true nature* of his character. After these events had taken place, the Reader will not find, the least hint, in the history of the Acts of the Apostles, of their expectations of *a temporal Messiah*—nor, do they seem to have entertained, the smallest doubt, that *the necessary proofs* had been given, that Jesus was THE MESSIAH. On the contrary they, in the most publick and decided manner, asserted that, by *his Resurrection from the dead, he was declared to be* THE SON OF GOD, the Messiah, *with power.* Thus St. Peter, addressing

* The Bishop of Landaff, in his Apology, for Christianity, in answer to Mr. Gibbon, has said, that "the Apostles knew but in part; and concerning this particular point (to wit, the coming of Christ to judge the world) Jesus himself had told them, just as he was about finally to leave them, that it was not for them to know the times and the seasons, which the Father had put in his own power." Page 64. And Mr. Thomas, in his Strictures on Dr. Edwards's Sermon, pages 28, 29, having said that our Lord seems, to declare that it was no part of his Mission to announce *the time of the final judgement*, and that Christ expressly prohibits *curiosity* in such enquiries, has quoted Acts i. 7. to prove it. But with all due submission, it may be observed, that this declaration of our Lord, has no relation whatever to *the end of the world*—but only to *the restoration of the Jews*, to a state of regal power. And that the question of the Disciples had a relation solely to that event, is evident beyond dispute! But more of this hereafter.

his countrymen, on the very day, as it should seem, of the effusion of the Holy Spirit, and, upon occasion of his having asserted *the Resurrection of Jesus*, boldly says, Acts ii. 36. *Let all the house of Israel know, assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ*—or Messiah. Again, chap. v. 30, 31. *The God of our fathers raised up his Son Jesus, whom ye slew and hung upon a tree: Him hath God exalted to be a Prince and a Saviour*—not to raise them to the possession of great *temporal dominion*—but, *to give repentance and forgiveness of Sins.* And, at the close of the same chapter, it is said, that *daily in the Temple and in every house, they ceased not to teach and to preach Jesus the Christ,* * or *the Messiah.* How different was this language from that which they had used, before these events took place? Their enquiry then was—*What shall be the sign of thy coming?* and, *When wilt thou restore the kingdom to Israel?*

From this change of language, upon the subject of *the coming of Christ*—or of *the Messiah;* it may reasonably be inferred—not only that the Disciples of Jesus had, completely, changed their sentiments, respecting *the nature of the Messiah's character*, and that consequently, they were fully satisfied that their former ideas were *erroneous:* but that *the Resurrection of Jesus*, which, in conjunction with the *descent of the Holy Spirit*, had produced this conviction, was so well authenticated, that it could not possibly be disputed. It can hardly be supposed, when human nature is fairly and impartially considered, that the Jews could have borne such repeated charges, with every mark of detestation and abhorrence of the infamous Crucifixion of a person who was *raised from the dead*, and that person too, claiming *the character of the Messiah*, if they had possessed, any possible means of proving, that he was *still* under the dominion of death; for *a real Resurrection from the dead*, could not but have been considered, as *a public attestation from Heaven* of the perfect innocence of Jesus and of the truth of his claim to *the character of the Messiah;* for, it must be recollected that it was, inconsequence of that claim, that they had put him to death, as *an*

* *Jesus* THE CHRIST—with the article. In the second chapter, verse 36, —the article is omitted; whether through the mistakes of Transcribers, must be left to those who are conversant in this kind of Criticism.

Impostor,

Impostor. If, on the contrary, there was really *no Resurrection*—what an hardiness of front, if the expression may be admitted, must the Disciples have been endued with, to have proclaimed, within a few days of his death, and in the very city in which he had been Crucified, that he was *risen from the dead*, and that, not before *a few*, who might be supposed to have been, in their interest—but, before *the Jewish Rulers*, who had been the principal authors and instigators of his murder? Let those who are best conversant, in the arts and artifices of mankind, produce an instance of effrontery like this—or one which was, so likely, to overwhelm the authors and contrivers of such a scheme, with everlasting obloquy and disgrace, upon the supposition that there was *no Resurrection.* They had just seen that *the Jewish Rulers* had *Crucified their Master*, for assuming *the character of the Messiah*, and was it to be supposed, that they would have been, less rigorous, towards those who publickly charged them, with having been his murderers? The Jewish Rulers, it is true, took offence at the boldness and intrepidity of the Apostles, and they endeavoured to put a stop to their progress, in *preaching Jesus and the Resurrection;* well knowing the effect it must necessarily have, in blasting their own characters: but, it is remarkable, that they took no steps to invalidate their testimony; nor adopted any measures, to crush *the rising religion*, but what involved them deeper in guilt, and more fully evinced their consciousness that what the Apostles had asserted, was not to be contradicted! The conduct of the Apostles, on the contrary, seems to have been, the natural result *of genuine integrity*, and *a thorough conviction* of the truth of what they had asserted; for, when the Jewish Rulers had commanded them *not to speak at all—nor to preach in the name of Jesus;* it is absolutely impossible not to admire the noble and intrepid firmness of their reply to this injunction. *Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken to you, more than to God—judge ye—for we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.* *

But

* " I shall not misrepresent the circumstances, or the conduct of the " Apostles," says Dr, Beattie, " if I suppose them to have addressed their " countrymen, the Jews, who were the first hearers of the Gospel, in " word like these: We tell you of this Man, our divine Master, many things " which ye yourselves know to be true; and nothing, in regard to which " ye may not, if ye candidly enquire, satisfy yourselves by the testimony of " creditable

But for argument's sake—let it be supposed that there really was *no Resurrection*, and that the Disciples of Jesus entertained hopes of success, in the execution of their plan, of *continuing to impose* upon their countrymen. Upon what foundation could these hopes have been built? They have, themselves, ingenuously recorded *the fact*—that their original belief that *the Messiah was to be a temporal Prince* remained *unshaken* to the very last—nor does there appear to have been a single exception to this, in the whole number of the Disciples of Jesus, whether Apostles—or others. As, therefore, it was impossible for them, not to have been thoroughly sensible of *the strength of their own prejudices*, upon this head—they must, consequently, have been, fully aware, of *the mighty difficulties*, which they would have to encounter, in correcting the like prejudices, in their countrymen. If Jesus had not been able to do away these prejudices, in their own case—how could they expect to be more successful? Nay; it must be extremely obvious, to the attentive Reader of *the Gospel History*, that upon the supposition that there was *no Resurrection*—the difficulties of their situation must have been wonderfully multiplied, even beyond those of Jesus; for it is evident, from the extensive view which has been taken, of this subject, that the attachment of the Disciciples, was preserved by *repeated assurances of the coming of the Messiah*, and by fixing a period, beyond which, *the commencement of his kingdom*, would not be deferred. Here was room for hope to build on, and they, manifestly, and beyond all reasonable doubt, were supported by that hope, in the expectation that his appearance, as *a temporal Prince*, would be realized! But how different was the situation of the Apostles, upon the commencement of their undertaking?

" creditable witnesses, who heard and saw what we affirm. From persisting " in falsehood we have nothing to hope; and ye in detecting it, can have " nothing to fear. The power of the state is in your hands; exert your- " selves to the utmost; and confute us if you can. Suppose an address of " this kind to be made to the French nation, concerning an history of " certain well known events that had happened in France, and suppose the " only answer returned, by public authority, to be as follows—On the " subject ye mention, we command you and your adherents to be silent on " pain of death:—Of which party, let me ask, would the world judge most " favourably? Would it not be said, that nothing could be more fair, than " what is declared on the one side; and that on the other, there at once ap- " peared invincible prejudice and implacable malignity?" See Beattie's Evidences of the Christian Religion, Vol. I. pages 66, 67.

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They had no such assurances to make, to *keep hope alive*—no prospects to hold out to them, of *a Messiah to come*. On the contrary—the person whom they had to point out to them, as *the Messiah*, had been *Crucified as a notorious Malefactor and Impostor*, for assuming *the Character of the Messiah*, and the only possible ground of hope of succeeding, in the execution of their plan, was the evidence which they had to produce, that *that same Jesus, whom their Rulers had Crucified, was raised from the dead*, and that, consequently, by that solemn attestation from Heaven—*the offence of the cross* was removed, and that *he was declared to be the* SON OF GOD—the Messiah, WITH POWER. Nothing less, it may confidently be affirmed, than a firm conviction, in their own minds, that they had sufficient proofs of *the reality of the Resurrection of Jesus*, and of the utter inability of their adversaries to deny their validity, could possibly have afforded them, the smallest hopes of success. And, even with this advantage; it must have required *an uncommon degree of fortitude*, and *a thorough good will* to the cause, to have engaged in the undertaking, after the proofs which they had had, in their own persons, of *the inveterate prejudices*, which they would have to encounter, independently of *the character of the Jews*, which, at this period, must have appeared, to them in all its deformity! So great, indeed, must the difficulties of their undertaking have appeared to them—that the conduct of the Apostles, in facing them is, scarcely to be accounted for, but from the extraordinary influence of *that Spirit*, with which they were endued, on the day of Pentecost; in which, the gracious promise of their divine Master, appears to have been completely fulfilled—that *he would be a mouth and wisdom to them, which all their adversaries would not be able to gainsay nor resist*, and that *they should be led into* ALL TRUTH, i. e. into all *the truth*, so far as concerned, *the true nature and design of the coming of the Messiah!*

These observations, upon *the Resurrection of Jesus*, and upon the situation in which the Apostles found themselves, upon his ascension into heaven, will not, it is hoped, be thought altogether unworthy of the judicious Reader's attention—nor foreign to the great Purpose of this Work. With respect to their strict conformity with *the real state* of things—the Reader who has attentively read the preceding pages, is fully competent to judge. It is, however, with much satisfaction,

faction, that the following remarks, upon the same subject, by Dr. Beattie, are presented for his perusal. " It deserves " particular Notice," says he, " that till after the death of " their Master—the Apostles were never cured of the national " mistake, that the Messiah was to be *a great temporal Prince*, " and to make the Jews, *the most powerful people in the* " *world.* Accordingly we find, that immediately after his " crucifixion, they were greatly disconcerted, and at a loss " what to think of him. We trusted, said they, *that it had* " *been he who should have redeemed Israel.* At that time, it " seems, the Cross was a stumbling block to them, as well " as to others. And no wonder, considering the hopes they " had formed, and the sad disappointment occasioned by an " event, which though he had plainly foretold it, they were " so unwilling to believe, as to flatter themselves that it could " not happen. In this state of confusion and trouble, if they " had entertained any suspicion of imposture; nay, if they had " not been certain that there was no imposture, might they not, " with a very good grace, and is it not probable that they " would have returned to their business and their first religion, " saying—This was not the man whom we believed him to be? " With this persuasion, which, on the present supposition, " they must have had, they, in affirming that he was risen from " the dead, and in continuing to teach what he had taught, must " have known themselves to be impostors. What then could " be their motive to persist in a lie? That which could be no " motive at all; the certain prospect of persecution and death, " (for how could they imagine it would fare better with them " than it had fared with their Master?) without any advantage " whatever to counterbalance those evils. And what would " have been their motives to return to their Jewish profession " and acknowledge they had been imposed on? The strongest " that can influence human nature: first, that indignation " which would be natural in men, who had forsaken all to " follow a person whom they now found to have deluded " them into a very dangerous snare: Secondly, the hope of " advancing their interest by doing that which must have " gratified their Rulers in the highest degree: And thirdly, " the conciousness of having, as became honest men, per- " formed a duty which they owed to themselves, their " religion, and their country. In fact, if they were endowed " with any share of understanding or of spirit; nay if they

" were

" were not both idiots and madmen, it is not possible to ac-
" count for their conduct, on any other supposition than
" this, that their testimony is true." See Beattie's Evidences of the Christian Religion, pages 144, &c. Vol. I.

Mr. Maltby, in his excellent Illustrations of the Christian Religion, has made the following very judicious remarks, upon this subject—" Let us consider the manner in which the Disciples
" of Jesus conducted themselves after their Master was put to
" death; after the ambitious hopes they had formed, were
" entirely extinguished; after the notions and expectations
" they had entertained of the character and power of the
" Messiah, in common with their countrymen, were com-
" pletely and cruelly outraged.

" In a short space of time, we find these very men leading
" a life, and adopting a conduct, suitable only to those who
" were entirely satisfied that Jesus was the true Messiah.
" They assert, upon their own knowledge, that he had risen
" from the dead, and they expose themselves to contumely,
" danger, and death, in proclaiming publickly that fact, as
" well as in bearing witness to the miraculous actions of
" their Master, during his life. And it is observable, that
" the very person, who had denied and abandoned his Master
" in a more solemn and public manner than the rest, was,
" after this interval of time, more bold and active in im-
" pressing upon the minds of others, his great qualities and
" high character; as if anxious to make amends, by subse-
" quent zeal, for former incredulity.

" Now surely it is extremely difficult, if not entirely im-
" possible, to devise any reason for this change of sentiment,
" and of conduct, except we admit, that the Disciples really
" believed the truth of what they taught. And as they as-
" serted these extraordinary facts, not upon the authority of
" others, but upon the repeated evidence of their own senses,
" in matters where their senses could not be deceived, I
" am unable to comprehend, how it can be practicable to
" evade the conclusion, that what they affirmed was true.

" The Disciples, it is evident, must know, whether Jesus
" really rose from the dead, or not. They had no temptation
" to assert the fact, if it had been untrue; and they had
" shewn by their conduct (in deserting him) before his death,
" and immediately after it, that if they had been mistaken or
" deceived in his character, they had not the courage, or the

" inclination, to defend and support it. Doubtless, from " their behaviour at that period, it may fairly be inferred, " that they were not insensible to the impulse of worldly and " ambitious motives; but still we should by no means be " justified in concluding from those facts, that they would " have countenanced an *impostor*, in order to promote such " ends. Yet, upon any other supposition than that of their " conviction that Jesus had actually and indeed risen from the " grave, we must believe that these men voluntarily exposed " themselves to disgrace, pain, and even death, for the sake " of supporting a lie; although they had given the clearest " proof, that the fear of these worldly evils had prevented " them from bearing testimony to the *truth*, and defending " the character of a man, whom they really revered.

" Inconsistency like this, without any assignable motive, " nay when every visible motive lay the contrary way, " cannot be admitted to be probable; and when by the easy " concession of believing these recorded truths, all these dif- " ficulties are immediately solved, is it not the duty of every " serious enquirer, to relax from the pride and obstinacy of " scepticism, and, in a strain of humble and grateful acknow- " ledgement, to admit the interference of God?" See pages " 145—149. *

The Reader hath now before him, the great out-line of the Scripture doctrine concerning *the coming of Christ*, so far as Christ himself is concerned in the charge which has been brought against it, by the Historian of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, and by the learned University Preacher. And it appears, with an evidence which is, *almost*, if not *altogether*, irresistible, that to do justice to the Christian records, they ought to be viewed as *Histories of the Controversy between our Lord and his countrymen*, concerning *the true nature of the character of the Messiah*—that his language concerning it, was such, as à priori, might have been expected, from the very nature of that controversy—that he could not have adopted *any other language*, without completely defeating the great purposes of his Mission—that the strongest expressions concerning *his coming*, and even those which respected *the destruction of Jerusalem*, cannot mean

* The Author laments much that he did not see this admirable Work sooner.

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any thing more than that that awful event would demonstrate how much they had mistaken *the true nature of the Messiah's character*, when they supposed that it would be productive of the greatest temporal advantage to them, as *a nation*, and such as would raise them, to the most distinguished pre-eminence among the nations of the world.

To the judicious and candid Reader of *the Gospel History*, it may safely be left to determine whether, even those who understand the discourses of Christ himself, in *a literal sense*, are not obliged, by all the rules *of historical evidence*, which, in the present case, is the best evidence which can possibly be desired; and, by all the principles of *sound reasoning*, to understand them of *his first coming*, as *the Messiah*; for to *that coming*, the thoughts of every Jew were, immediately and necessarily directed, upon the declaration of Jesus, that *the kingdom of heaven was at hand*. To *that coming* they, evidently, and beyond all reasonable ground of dispute, directed *their chief attention*; not only, at the beginning of the ministry of Jesus, but throughout every period of his Life, and even after his Resurrection from the dead; as is abundantly evident, from the questions of the Disciples and of the Pharisees; the one asking him—*When he would restore the kingdom to Israel?*—the other, *When the kingdom of God should come?* To *that coming* Jesus himself directed their thoughts, as *the ultimate object*, of all their hopes and expectations and, as that, concerning which, it was absolutely necessary for them to be fully satisfied about; never varying, or deviating, in the least, from the general purport of his *original language*—or leading them to think, otherwise, than as they had themselves, from the very beginning, thought, so far at least, as *the coming of the Messiah* only, was concerned. With respect indeed to *the real nature of his coming*—they differed from each other, as widely as possible; the one viewing it as *a spiritual*, and the other as *a temporal kingdom*. But with regard to *the coming itself*—*both* had a reference, in the language which was made use of, upon the subject—not to HIS SECOND COMING *in the clouds of heaven to judge all mankind*—but simply and exclusively, to HIS FIRST COMING, as *the Messiah*, and to *the establishment of that kingdom*, which was necessarily connected with *his coming, in that character*. In one word—the whole of the Gospel History, must, to do it strict justice, be considered as one continued chain

of evidence that Jesus was *the true Messiah*, notwithstanding he laid no claim to *the character of a temporal Prince*.

To those who are at all capable of judging of the nature of *genuine historical evidence*—nothing can appear more satisfactory than the conduct of our Lord, in this matter—nothing more strictly proper or necessary than the language which he made use of. It is even difficult to imagine, that he would have been listened to, at all, if he had said that he was *the Messiah*—or that he, as such, was *already come*; having none of those proofs to offer, of his sustaining that character, which they had, *invariably*, affixed to it.—Or if he had been listened to, it would have been *only* to have taken advantage of the declaration, in order that they might put him to death as *an Impostor*. But by the conduct which he actually did pursue—all their expectations were kept afloat—their confidence in the character of Jesus as *an extraordinary personage*, was increased, and time was given for the gradual correction of their prejudices—for instilling into their minds, right ideas of *the true nature of the Messiah's character*—for unfolding to them, the various events which were to happen, in the course of his ministry, and, particularly, for leading them to form a just estimate of the rectitude of the conduct of Providence, in the approaching ruin of their country, from their own observation of the flagitious conduct of the great body of *the Jews*, and especially of their *Rulers!*

As the temporal prosperity of their country, under *the reign of their Messiah*, was the darling theme of *the Jewish nation*, and that on which their hearts were, chiefly fixed, as *the grand characteristic of the Messiahship*: it was, more particularly, the object of the ministry of Jesus, to shew that no such prosperity was to be expected. This, it hath been observed, he pursued, in a language which, in some instances, was highly figurative—but, by no means, uncommon among the Prophets of their nation, when great temporal calamities were described—but that this language might not be mistaken, he further described the calamities which were approaching, in terms which were divested of all figure, and which could be applied to *temporal calamities* ONLY. To this subject, it hath been shewn, with an evidence, bordering on demonstration; the xxivth of Matthew and its parallel chapters, together with the xviith of Luke, and his solemn declaration, before the Jewish Rulers, upon his trial, of *his coming in clouds*, exclusively relate!

Upon

Upon the whole, the reasoning of Mr. Henry Taylor, appears to be highly deserving the attention of those who would form an accurate judgment of the objection of the Historian of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, respecting *the Scripture Doctrine of the coming of Christ:* for having quoted the objection of the Historian of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, which it was the principal design of this Work to confute, he says,—"He might have said more "justly, that the revolution of seventeen centuries has in- "structed us, that those who understand the text as he does, "contrary to Reason and Prophecy, and Fact, understand it "wrong, and ought to press the mysterious language of pro- "phecy and Revelation as *closely* as possible, in order to "elicit the true precise meaning of it, and not to rest content "with a superficial examination, which leaves them in a state "little short of Infidelity. Here then," says this Writer, "let us join issue: if those who understand the discourses of "Christ, in a literal sense, are obliged to believe his *second* "*coming* was foretold by him to be accomplished, before the "end of the then current generation; the revolution of seven- "teen centuries has proved the prophecy to be *false*. But if "those who understand the discourses of Christ, in a literal "sense, are not obliged to believe his *second coming* was fore- "told to be accomplished, before the end of that genera- "tion—the prophecy may, in a literal sense, be true, and "the revolution of seventeen centuries will prove, that "Mr. Gibbon has mistaken the sense of it."*

Let the judicious and impartial Reader now determine, from the evidence which has, at large, been laid before him, in the preceding pages, and even from this short abstract, whether *his first* or *his second coming*, is to be understood, in these discourses of Christ, and let him pronounce sentence, upon *the truth*, or *falsehood of Christianity*, as his cool and deliberate judgement shall direct him. While the Christian records possess such ample evidence of the truth of the case—no apprehension, it may, with confidence be affirmed, needs to be entertained, as to the consequences of such a decision! If the Gospels be examined, with that accuracy and precision to which they are, on all accounts, justly entitled, *as Histories*, and as Histories containing *the genuine evidences of the real nature of the Messiah's Character*, in opposition to that

* See Taylor's Thoughts on the Grand Apostacy, page 50.

which

which *the Jewish Nation* had formed of it—no sound and impartial Reasoner will think it necessary to concede the objection to the adversary. However imperfect the preceding view of the subject may be, enough of evidence has been adduced to render it, in the highest degree probable, that no such meaning was ever intended by our Lord, as that *he should come again* IN PERSON, *in that generation, to judge all mankind!*

But the Historian of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, has not only charged our Lord, with having asserted, that THE SECOND COMING *of the Son of Man in the clouds, to judge all mankind, would be, in that generation*—but, as was extremely naturally to be expected from such a charge; he has farther declared that, "*the near approach of that wonderful event, had likewise been predicted by the Apostles.*" And he has principally grounded this assertion, upon the first Epistle to the Thessalonians. *

It is, undoubtedly, a very material point gained, if it has been proved, to the satisfaction of the judicious and intelligent Reader, that Christ himself taught no such doctrine, as has been laid to his charge, by the Historian of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire;—but, while the other part of his objection remains, in its full force—the credit of Christianity will still be, materially, and indeed, essentially affected; for though it be, in the fullest manner demonstrated, that Christ himself, taught no such doctrine—yet, if his Disciples did—the blame will, upon every principle of sound reasoning, ultimately, fall upon him. Nothing can be more evident than that the persons to whom Jesus gave a commission, to communicate the knowledge of his Religion to mankind, should *themselves*, be properly qualified for the right discharge of the duties of their office, and particularly that they should be made acquainted, with the most essential and fundamental part of their commission—namely, *the true na-*

* "This expectation," he says, "was countenanced by the xxivth "chapter of St. Matthew, and by the first Epistle of St. Paul to the Thes-"salonians. Erasmus removes the difficulty, by the help of Allegory "and Metaphor, and the learned Grotius ventures to insinuate, that for "wise purposes, the pious deception was permitted to take place." See Gibbon's History, Vol. I. 4to. in the Notes, page 69. In the early part of this Work, it was stated that many other Writers were of this opinion—nor has the Author met with a single instance, among his acquaintance, in which the difficulty has not been forcibly felt, without their being able to satisfy themselves that the charge is capable of being removed.

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ture of the Messiah's kingdom and, *the duration* of it, too, so far at least, as to guard them against falling into such errors, upon the subject, as might, at any future period, materially affect the credit of his Religion; of which they were, the appointed, and, after the Ascension of Jesus, *the sole Ministers.*

It hath, indeed, been said, by one of the most respectable advocates for Christianity which this, or perhaps any age has produced, that "though it should be true that the Apostles "expected Christ would come in their time; it will not "follow that this their error ought, in anywise to diminish "their authority as Preachers of the Gospel—that it can be "no impeachment, either of their integrity as men—or their "ability as historians—or their honesty as Preachers of the "Gospel, that they were unacquainted with what had never "been revealed to them—that they followed their own under-"standings, where they had no better light to guide them;—"speaking from conjecture, when they could not speak from "certainty;—of themselves, when they had no command-"ment of the Lord;"—that "they knew but in part, and "prophesied but in part; and" that "concerning this "particular point, Jesus himself had told them, just as he "was about finally to leave them, that it was not for them to "*know the times and the seasons, which the Father had put* "*in his own power,*" and that it "is not to be wondered at, "that the Apostles were left in a state of uncertainty, con-"cerning the time in which Christ should appear; since "Beings, far more exalted, and more highly favored of "Heaven than they, were under an equal degree of ignorance: "*Of that day,* says our Saviour, *and of that hour, knoweth* "*no one: no, not the Angels which are in Heaven, neither* "*the Son, but the Father only.*" See Bishop Watson's "Apology, pages 64, 65.

It was this language of the worthy Prelate which probably led the learned University Preacher to assert, that he did not appear to be *extremely solicitous* to relieve the Apostles from the accusation of error. And, most certain it is, that no language could ever have been, more improperly applied than to the Apostles; for if they were unacquainted with what had never been revealed to them, they might, at least, have been silent upon the subject. If they spoke *from conjecture*—when they could not speak from certainty—*of themselves*—when they had

had *no commandment*, they ought, upon so important an occasion, to have apprized their Readers of these circumstances. But, so far were the Apostles from giving the slightest intimations, of this nature, that they asserted, in the strongest terms, and that, without the most distant idea of doubt, that *the Lord was at hand*,—that *the coming of the Lord was drawing nigh*, and that *they even saw the day approaching*. In short, no language could have been more peremptory and decisive, upon the subject, than that which the Apostles made use of! The authority of the Apostles therefore, appears to have been, as materially, concerned, in this matter, *as Preachers of the Gospel*, as that of our Lord himself!

With respect to the knowledge which the Apostles possessed concerning *the nature and duration of the Messiah's Kingdom*: it should be observed, that they had been, expressly told, by our Lord himself, that *when the spirit of truth should come, they should be led into* all truth; which, necessarily supposes, their being instructed, in every thing, which concerned both *the nature and duration of the Messiah's kingdom*—or, at least, that they should not be led to imagine, much less to assert, in such direct and explicit terms, as have been supposed, that *the end of the world was*, in their own time, very near *at hand*. *

But,

* The Bishop of Landaff has said that "When the time of our Saviour's "Ministry was nearly at an end, he thought proper to raise the spirits of his "Disciples, who were quite cast down with what he had told them about "his design of leaving of them; by promising, that he would send to them "the Holy Ghost, the Comforter, the Spirit of truth. And we know that "this his promise was accomplished on the day of Pentecost, when they "were all filled with the Holy Ghost; and we know farther, that from that "time forward, they were enabled to speak with tongues, to work miracles, to preach the word with power, and to comprehend the mystery of "the new dispensation, which was committed to them. But," says the Bishop, "we have no reason from hence to conclude, that they were immediately inspired with the apprehension of whatever might be known; "that they became acquainted with all kinds of truth." Most certainly not. Religious truth *only* was included in the promise—but how could the Apostles, "comprehend the mystery of the new dispensation, which was committed unto them," if they could suppose that *the day of Judgment* would take place, in their own time? The promise that they should be led into *all truth*, was nugatory, if it did not comprehend a matter of such importance as this. If "they were undoubtedly led into such truths, as it was necessary for "them to know, in order to their converting the world to Christianity," it is in the highest degree absurd to suppose that they could have believed that *the*

But, it will possibly, and surely, with the greatest propriety, be asked,—what evidences there are, that the Apostles did understand the extensive and remote purposes of *the Messiah's reign?* To this, it may be replied, that if the Apostles be considered merely *as Jews*—they cannot well be supposed to have been ignorant of the language of the antient Prophets, upon this subject, and of their Predictions, of its happy and extensive effects, upon mankind. With what eyes must they have read the following description of those happy times, by the Prophet Isaiah, Chap. ii. 4. if they could have supposed that *the day of Judgment* was to take place *in their own time? They shall beat their Swords into Plowshares, and their Spears into Pruning-hooks: Nation shall not rise against Nation—neither shall they learn War any more.* Or, how understand, the picturesque and beautiful language, of the same Prophet, Chap. xi. 6. of the wonderful effects, which this new order of things was, sooner or later, to produce, in the most savage and ungovernable natures? *The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid and the calf, and the young lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed together—their young ones shall also lie down together, and the lion shall eat straw like the ox—and the sucking child shall play on the hole of the Asp: They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the Sea.* With this also agrees the language of the Prophet Daniel, of which *no Jew*, can well be supposed to have been ignorant, when he termed *the Messiah's Kingdom*—AN EVERLASTING KINGDOM, and *as that which should* NEVER *be destroyed;* which, most certainly, could not have been understood, otherwise, than as *of a long duration.* And, the adoption of this Prophet's language, in announcing *the approach of this kingdom*, both by John the Baptist and our Lord, very naturally, brought this idea, of *its duration*, to their recollection. Nor was the description, of the latter, of the mighty progress

the day of Judgment was to take place in their own time. "In other "things," things which did not concern their Mission, "they were pro-"bably left to the exercise of their understandings, as other men usually are," but in this—the promise was not fulfilled, if they were not fully instructed, upon so important a point. See the Bishop of Landaff's Apology for Christianity, pages 61, 62, 63.

which his religion was to make, in the world, in his parables of *the grain of mustard-seed*, and of *the leaven which was hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened*, less calculated to confirm these expectations.

If it be said, that the Apostles might understand this language, *exclusively* of the abundant *temporal prosperity* of their Nation, and of their so completely overcoming all opposition to that universal sway, which they expected, under *the reign of the Messiah*, that the most perfect and absolute submission, would ensue; it is not, improbable, that, prior to the descent of the holy spirit, this was the light in which they viewed these prophecies—but even in this view—the predictions of the Prophets, were totally incompatible with *the speedy dissolution of the world*. But, when the descent of the spirit had wrought a change, in the sentiments of the Apostles, concerning *the nature of the Messiah's Kingdom*; it appears that their sentiments, concerning *its duration*, were so far from being altered, that they seem to have had, a perfectly clear and distinct idea of its future prosperity.

The call of the Gentiles was, expressly foretold, in the Prophecies of the Old Testament. Thus Isaiah xlii. 1. *Behold my Servant whom I uphold—mine Elect, in whom my soul delighteth—I have put my spirit upon him—he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles*: and in the 6th verse, he explains this, of *his giving him for a covenant of the people—for a light of the Gentiles*. The same Prophet calls upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, in the following animated manner; Chap. lx. 1, 2. *Arise—shine—for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee. The Gentiles shall come to thy light, and Kings to the brightness of thy rising.*

Whatever ideas the Apostles entertained, of these, and other remarkable passages, which might be mentioned, concerning *the call of the Gentiles*, prior to *the day of Pentecost*, they afterwards, plainly, understood that *the Gentiles* were to be admitted, to equal privileges, with the Jews, under *the reign of the Messiah*. In the well known rehearsal of St. Peter's vision, recorded in the xith chapter of the Acts of the Apostles—his own prejudices as well as those of his countrymen, upon this head, are very strongly stated. And nothing could have been more honorable and praise-worthy, than the language which he made use of, upon that occasion; for he candidly acknowledged *his extreme reluctance* to relinquish

quish his prejudices in favor of the exclusive privileges of his nation, and confessed that the declared will of God, *alone*, had conquered his reluctance! *What was I, that I should withstand God?* And his hearers drew this conclusion from his representation of the matter—*Then hath God granted to* THE GENTILES *repentance unto life.* In the xivth chapter, it is related that *Paul and Barnabas rehearsed all that God had done, and how he had*, by their means, *opened the door of faith to the Gentiles*; and, in the following chapter, the conversion of *the Gentiles*, is said *to have caused great joy to all the Brethren.*

With these facts in view; it was extremely natural for such a man, as St. Paul, to have furnished himself with every degree of information which antient prophecy might afford him, upon the subject of *the call of the Gentiles*, and particularly, as he was, by way of eminence, *the Apostle of the Gentiles.* And this is not a mere conjecture; for many passages might be adduced, which fully evince, how much he actually did turn his attention to this subject; from which the following is selected as a remarkable example, wherein he quotes a prophecy from Hosea concerning the divine designs towards *the Gentiles. I will call them my people which were not my people, and her beloved which was not beloved.* And in the same Epistle he dwells largely upon *the conversion of the Gentiles*, blending with it, *the rejection of the Jews*; which, as *a Jew*, he very naturally terms *a mystery*, which he seems scarcely to be able to comprehend—or how to fathom the reasons of the divine conduct towards them. *O the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God—how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!* But though he appears to have been so deeply affected at the thought of *the rejection of the Jews*; yet it is remarkable, that he looks forward and comforts himself with the animating expectation that *though blindness in part had happened unto Israel*; yet that it would continue ONLY until *the fulness of the Gentiles*, and that *then all Israel should be saved.* With these enlarged views upon the subject—how improbable was it that St. Paul should predict *the speedy approach of the day of Judgment?* Most certainly he, of all the Apostles, was the most unlikely to have entertained such an idea! Yet he is the man, upon whom this imputation has been chiefly fixed.

But this is not all; for the Apostle Paul has predicted some other very striking events which were totally incompatible with his belief that *the end of the world* would happen, in his own time. "I will produce you, Sir, a Prophecy," says the Bishop of Landaff in his letters to Mr. Gibbon, "which "the more closely you press it, the more reason you will "have to believe, that the speedy coming of Christ" (to judge the world) "could never have been predicted by the "Apostles. Take it as translated by Bp. Newton. *But the "Spirit speaketh expressly that, in the latter times, some shall "apostatize from the faith, giving heed to erroneous spirits "and doctrines concerning demons; through the hypocrisy "of liars, having their conscience seared with a red-hot iron— "forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from "meats.* Here you have an express prophecy—the Spirit "hath spoken it—that in the latter times—not immediately—"but at some distant period—some should apostatize from "the faith—some, who had been Christians should, in truth, "be so no longer—but should give heed to erroneous spirits "and doctrines concerning demons:—Press this expression "closely, and you may, perhaps, discover in it the erroneous "tenets, and the demon, or Saint-worship of the church of "Rome;—through the hypocrisy of liars;—you recognize, "no doubt, the priesthood and the martyrologists;—having "their conscience seared with a red-hot iron:—Callous, indeed, "must his conscience be, who trafficks in indulgences:—for-"bidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats:—"This language needs no pressing; it discovers, at once, the "unhappy votaries of monastic life, and the mortal sin of "eating flesh on fast days." *

To this may be added, what the same learned Prelate has very justly observed, that "St. Peter speaks of putting off "his tabernacle, as the Lord had shewn him, and of his "endeavour that the Christians, after his decease, might be "able to have these things in remembrance. And as to St. "Paul, upon a partial view of whose writings, the doctrine "of the speedy coming of Christ to judge the world is prin-"cipally founded; it is manifest that he was conscious he "should not live to see it, notwithstanding the expression—"*We which are alive;* for he foretels his own death in express

* See Bishop Watson's Apology, pages 58, 59, 60.

"terms.

" terms. *The time of my departure is at hand;*—and he " speaks of his reward, not as *immediately* to be conferred " upon him—but *as laid up and reserved for him* till some " future day. *I have fought a good fight—I have finished* " *my course—henceforth there is laid up for me, a crown of* " *righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall* " *give me at that day.* *

Nor must, what another writer has excellently well observed upon this subject, be omitted. " Whoever," says Mr. Thomas, " will be at the pains to examine their own " simple history of themselves, will find, that by founding " churches, on constitutions adapted to endure for ages, " and by the judicious appointment of Successors—provided " for the gradual propagation of a religion which compre- " hended very remote ages—they discovered no apprehension " of universal judgment to take place, nor any expectation " of the last grand catastrophe of expiring nature. So far " indeed from St. Paul's expecting the end of the world in his " own time—that he plainly intimated that it was to endure " for ages. *God*, saith he, *hath raised us up together, that* " *in the ages to come, he might shew the exceeding riches of* " *his grace.*" Ephes. ii. 6, 7. See Mr. Thomas's Strictures on Dr. Edwards's Sermon, pages 41, 42.

Thus various and accumulated are the evidences drawn from the sacred books, that the Apostles taught no such doctrine, as has been imputed to them, respecting *the speedy dissolution of the world.* But what, it may be said, signifies all this accumulation of evidence, when it is contradicted by evidence which is, at least, equally strong, and by the Apostles asserting, in the clearest and most distinct terms, that *the coming of the Lord was drawing nigh*—that *the Lord was at hand*, and that *they* even *saw the day approaching*, with other expressions of the like nature?

If this language of the Apostles was actually meant, by them, to be applied to *the final judgment of the world*, and is, clearly incapable of any other application—there will be an end of the controversy, and it must then be confessed, without reserve, that they either were *mistaken*—or that they were guilty of *the most manifest contradiction.* In either case, it will necessarily make against the credit of the Apostles—but, in the former—the historian of the Decline and fall of the

* See Bishop Watson's Apology, pages 54, 55.

Roman

Roman Empire was certainly justified in his assertion that "the records of seventeen centuries, have instructed, us not "to press too closely the mysterious language of prophecy "and revelation;" and the adversaries of Christianity, upon every principle of sound reasoning, will be entitled to the inference which, it seems, they would wish to draw from it, viz. that it is *an Imposture*. But, as was said before, in the case of the like charge against our Lord, before a conclusion, so fatal to *the interests of Christianity*, is permitted to be drawn; it ought to be shewn, with an evidence, which is irresistible, that these passages must necessarily be applied to *the day of Judgment*, and that they are absolutely incapable, upon the principles of sound reasoning, of any other sense; otherwise Christianity may still be true, and the Apostles be fully vindicated from the charge, as well as from the inconsistency, which in that case, would attach to them. The question then is, whether, when the Apostles asserted that *the Lord was at hand*, with other similar expressions, they may not, with the strictest propriety, be applied to *the destruction of Jerusalem*; which it is allowed, on all hands, was to happen within a short distance from the time when the Epistles, in which these expressions occur, were written.

To ascertain this matter, with all the precision of which the subject is capable, and to give the judicious and impartial Reader, all the satisfaction which can reasonably be required; it will be requisite, particularly, to attend to the language which was in common use, in the sacred writings of the Jewish nation, when *the near approach* of any remarkable *temporal calamities* was described. The Prophet Isaiah, when speaking of the destruction of Babylon, says, Chap. xiii. 6, 9. *Howl ye*—FOR THE DAY OF THE LORD IS AT HAND—*it shall come, as a destruction from the Almighty. Behold,* THE DAY OF THE LORD COMETH *to lay the land desolate.* Joel i. 15. *Alas,* FOR THE DAY—FOR THE DAY OF THE LORD IS AT HAND, and *as a destruction from the Almighty, it shall come.* Zeph. i. 7. *Hold thy peace at the presence of the Lord God*—FOR THE DAY OF THE LORD IS AT HAND—*for the Lord hath prepared a sacrifice—he hath bid his guests.* Ezek. xxx. 2, 3. *Son of Man prophecy and say—Thus saith the Lord God—howl ye—woe worth the day*—FOR THE DAY IS NEAR—*even* THE DAY OF THE LORD IS NEAR—*a cloudy day—it shall be the time of the heathen.* And, most remarkable, is

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the expression of the Prophet Amos, Chap. v. 18. particularly when it is compared with our Lord's description of the approach of *the destruction of Jerusalem*, in Luke xvii. 22. *Woe unto you that desire* THE DAY OF THE LORD—*to what end is it for you?* THE DAY OF THE LORD *is darkness and not light.*

From these examples, it is abundantly evident, that in the description of any remarkable temporal calamities; it was *the customary language of prophecy*, as it was, in fact, *the language of genuine piety*, to represent that, as *the Lord's doing* which was effected by human agency, and to point out their *near approach*, by the phrases—*the coming of the Lord*—*the day of the Lord being at hand*, and by other expressions of a similar nature.

When it is considered that *the destruction of Jerusalem*, was an event which our Lord had predicted, with a particular degree of pecision, and that he had connected its accomplishment, with *the full manifestation of the true nature of his character*, as THE MESSIAH, in opposition to the general opinion, which had been entertained concerning it; it will not be surprising that the Apostles should have alluded to *the near approach* of that event, in their epistolary correspondence with their Christian brethren.* Indeed, if they had not, their epistles would have wanted one material evidence of their genuine authenticity; for, when they had occasion to speak of this event; it should seem that nothing could have been more natural for them, both *as Jews*, and as *pious and good men*, to adopt the language of the Prophets, and it is worthy of observation, that it was a language which they must have found, particularly, convenient to them, as it was, too general, to be laid hold of, by their adversaries, to their detriment. And this alone, in times like those in which they lived, was a matter of no trifling consequence! If, therefore, no other evidence, to justify the language which the Apostles have adopted, could have been adduced—this alone, instead of being objectionable, would have been, *a strong*

* It might be observed here, that the destruction of Jerusalem was the last and crowning evidence to the whole world, how much they had mistaken *the nature of the Messiah's character*. "Christ," says Dr. Jortin, "had foretold it so expressly that if he had failed, his Religion could not "have supported itself." See Jortin's Remarks, Vol. I. page 20.

internal

internal proof, of the genuine integrity and prudence of their conduct; for *as Jews—as good men* and *as men who had every thing to fear, from the malevolence of their adversaries*—they could not, with so much propriety, have adopted any other language—they could not have given a more effectual proof of their attention to their divine Master's precept—*to be wise as serpents and harmless as doves!*

As it appears from the examples alledged, and for the reasons which have been thus particularly stated, that the Apostles made use of the above phrases, in conformity to the common practice of the antient Prophets, in describing *temporal calamities;* so it likewise appears, that for the like purpose they adopted the phrase *the coming of Christ*, as the Prophet Daniel had, particularly, foretold that *the coming of the Messiah* would be, *in clouds*, or in *the clouds of Heaven*; and more particularly as Jesus himself had constantly connected *his coming* as *the Messiah*, with the awful calamity of *the destruction of Jerusalem*. Hence it became, a significant expression, to denote that awful event, and perhaps it will not be saying too much to state that it was used, in its stead, by the Apostles, *as a much more convenient* and *less offensive method* of expressing themselves, upon so very delicate and disagreeable a subject, than any other which could have been adopted. *

That the phrase *the coming of Christ*, was used in this sense, by the Apostles, in their Epistles, seems to have been acknowledged, by Commentators of all descriptions, however much they may have differed from each other, with respect to the passages to be so applied. Bishop Hallifax, of whose Sermon on the Man of Sin, particular notice will be taken hereafter, admits, without hesitation, that "*the coming* and "*the day of Christ*, are sometimes used to denote nothing "more than *the final demolition of the Jewish polity*." Dr.

* Our own times have furnished a very striking instance of the propriety of the Apostles conduct. The noted Mr. Brothers, whether from Political views, or from a mental derangement is immaterial, predicted great calamities, as about to happen to this country. When his predictions became the object of much attention, it is obvious that they very properly attracted the attention of Governmemt, and indeed no Government can with safety, be inattentive to matters of this nature It seems, therefore, impossible not to admit the propriety of the conduct of the Apostles, in using a language, which though sufficiently expressive, was not capable of being laid hold of to their detriment.

Benson

Benson says, " *The coming of Christ* does *sometimes signify* " *his coming to the destruction of Jerusalem*;"—and he adds, " the Apostle very justly declared, *the coming of the Lord*, " to be then just *at hand*." But Dr. Macknight, in his account of the different *comings of Christ*, which are spoken of in the New Testament, is very particular, upon this head. And though his account appears, in some respects, to be objectionable, yet it will not be unworthy of the Reader's attention, as it will, in the main, be found to corroborate what has been advanced, upon the subject, in the preceding part of this Work. " In the Prophetic Writings of the " Jews (2 Sam. xxii. 10, 12. Psalm xcvii. 2—5. Isaiah " xix. 1.)" he says, " great exertions of the divine power, " whether for the Salvation or destruction of nations, are " called *the coming*—*the appearing*, and *the presence of God*. " Hence it was natural for the Apostles, who were Jews, to " call any signal and evident interposition of Christ, as " Governor of the world, for the accomplishment of his " purposes, *his coming*, and *his day*. Accordingly, those " exertions of his power and providence, whereby he de- " stroyed *Jerusalem and the Temple*, abrogated the Mosaic " institutions, and established the Gospel, are called by his " Apostles *his coming* and *day*; not only in allusion to the " antient prophetic language—but because Christ himself, in " his prophecy concerning the events, recorded Matt. xxiv. " hath termed them *the coming of the Son of Man*, in allusion " to the following phophecy of Daniel, of which his own " prophecy is an explication, Dan. vii. 13. *I saw in the* " *night visions, and behold one like the Son of Man, came with* " *the clouds of heaven, and came to the Antient of Days, and* " *they brought him near before him.* Ver. 14. *And there* " *was given him dominion and glory, and a kingdom, that* " *all people, nations, and languages, should serve him. His* " *dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass* " *away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed.* " This prophecy, the Jewish Doctors, with one consent, in- " terpreted of their Messiah, and of that temporal kingdom " which they expected was to be given to him. Farther, " they supposed he would erect that temporal kingdom by great " visible exertions of his power, for the destruction of his " enemies. But they little suspected that themselves were " of the number of those enemies whom he was to destroy,

"and that his kingdom was to be established upon the ruin "of their state. Yet that was the true meaning of the coming "of Son of Man in the clouds of heaven. For while the "Jewish nation continued in Judea, and observed the in-"stitutions of Moses, they violently opposed the preaching "of the gospel by which Messiah was to reign over all "people, nations, and languages. That the everlasting king-"dom therefore might be effectually established, it was neces-"sary that Jerusalem and the Jewish state should be destroyed "by the Roman armies. Now, seeing our Lord foretold this "sad catastrophe, in the words of the Prophet Daniel, (Matt. "xxiv. 30.) *And they shall see the Son of Man coming in the* "*clouds of heaven, with power and great glory*: and after "describing every particular of it, with the greatest exactness, "seeing he told his disciples, ver. 34. *This generation shall* "*not pass till all these things be fulfilled*: can there be any "doubt that the Apostles, (who, when they wrote their "Epistles, certainly understood the true import of this "Prophecy), by their Master's coming, and by the end of all "things, which they represent as at hand, meant his coming "to destroy Jerusalem, and to put an end to the institution "of Moses?"

And a little lower the Doctor makes this remarkable assertion, "That every passage of their Epistles, in which the Apostles "have spoken of these things as *at hand*, may, with the "greatest propriety, be interpreted of *Christ's coming to* "*establish his everlasting kingdom over all people, nations,* "*and languages*, by *destroying Jerusalem*, putting an end "to the law of Moses, and spreading the Gospel through the "world." See Dr. Macknight on the Two Epistles to the Thessalonians, pages 67, 68.*

The fact being thus fully acknowledged, that the phrase *the coming of Christ*, as well as the expressions *the coming of the Lord*, and of *the day of the Lord*, are sometimes used by the Apostles to signify *the destruction of Jerusalem*; it will be necessary to enter into a critical examination of some of those passages, upon which the Historian of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, and others, have founded their opinion,

* It is very extraordinary that Dr. Macknight, after such an assertion, should have interpreted 1 Thess. v. *of the end of the world*—for the near approach of some awful event is there, most clearly, described.

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that the Apostles predicted *the near approach of the end of the world*, that it may be clearly ascertained, to the Satisfaction of the judicious Reader, that they have been improperly applied to that event.

As the two Epistles to the Thessalonians, are *the first*, in point of difficulty, and as the former of them has been particularly singled out, by the Historian of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, as asserting *the near approach of the End of the world*; they, of course, will demand the Reader's first attention.

To ascertain, with all possible precision, the meaning of the Apostle, in these two Epistles, so far at least as this enquiry is concerned; it will be necessary to attend to the nature of Epistolary Writing. Bishop Newton has very properly observed upon this subject, that "there are difficulties "in the Epistles of the New Testament, which are common "to all Epistolary Writings. Letters," he observes, "can "seldom be understood but by those who write them, or by "those to whom they are written. And the reason hereof is "evident, because other people, perhaps, know little of the "parties concerned—their dispositions—their circumstances, "and what have been transacted between them. In letters, "many things are only hinted at, which, to present and de"scribe at large would be tedious, or perhaps offensive. "Many things are said in answer to letters sent, and questions "proposed; which things may be open and easy enough to "the persons to whom the letters are addressed, but will "want explanation to strangers. These difficulties," the Bishop very properly adds, "are to be found, not only in the "Epistles of the New Testament, but are common to them "with all other Epistolary Writings."* And Mr. Locke, to whom these remarks appear to have been originally due, has very judiciously observed, that "if we had those letters addressed "to the Apostles, and questions proposed to them—they "would much better clear those passages that relate to them, "than all the learned notes of Critics and Commentators "who, in after times, fill us with their conjectures; for "very often, as to the matter in hand, they are nothing "else," †

* See Bishop Newton's Dissertation on the Difficulties of Scripture, Vol. VI. page 214.

† See Mr. Locke's preface to his Commentary upon the Epistles.

It is happy for the Christian Enquirer, who lives in these distant times, that these deficiences are, in a considerable degree, and, perhaps, much beyond what has hitherto been imagined, supplied, by the connection of the Epistles of the New Testament, with *the Evangelical History*, and particularly, with the important doctrine or controversy concerning *the nature and manner of* THE COMING OF CHRIST. Whatever might have been doubtful or obscure, in the Epistles, when taken by themselves, may, in many cases, at least, be rendered perfectly clear and intelligible, by a careful attention to *the Gospel History*. Nor will the judicious and intelligent Reader, think it reasonable to reject any *collateral evidence*, which may be drawn from *the history of those times*, though not communicated immediately through the Channel of *the sacred Historians*.

With these observations in view—the fourth and fifth chapters of the First Epistle to the Thessalonians must be examined with the utmost attention, in order, if possible, to ascertain, with critical accuracy and precision, what is their true and genuine meaning.

Now, the first thing which is particularly worthy of notice, in these chapters, with relation to the present enquiry is, that the Apostle states, *three distinct cases*, which have all the appearance, from the abrupt and unconnected manner in which they are introduced, of being answers to *as many distinct questions*. These are—*the matter concerning brotherly love*, in the ninth verse of the fourth chapter,—the matter *concerning the situation of those of the Thessalonians, who had departed this life*, in the thirteenth verse,—and the matter *concerning the times and the seasons*, in the beginning of the following chapter.

If the former part of the ivth chapter of this Epistle, be examined with attention, there is nothing which appears to have any particular relation to the case concerning *brotherly love*, mentioned in the 9th verse, and as has just been observed, from the manner in which it is introduced; it seems highly propable that it was suggested to the Apostle's mind, by something which had passed between him and the Thessalonians, either in conversation, or in writing. But, be this as it may—the subject is so completely different from that which immediately follows it, that it cannot admit of a doubt, that it is entirely finished.

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The matter concerning those *who had departed this life, in the faith of Christ*, immediately follows, from the 13th verse to the close of the chapter, and most unquestionably relates to the general resurrection of the just. *But I would not have you to be ignorant brethren, concerning those who are asleep, that ye sorrow not, as others, who have no hope; for if we believe that Jesus died and rose again—even so them also who sleep in Jesus, will God*—or rather will he * *bring with him*, i. e. when he comes to judge all mankind: *For this we say to you, by the word of the Lord, that we the living who remain unto the coming of the Lord, shall not prevent those who are asleep; for the Lord himself shall descend from heaven, with a shout—with the voice of the Arch-Angel, and with the trump of God, and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we, the living who remain*—or according to the common translation, *who remain alive, shall be caught in the air, and so shall we ever be with the Lord.*

From the expressions in the 15th and 17th verses—*We who remain alive*; it has been inferred that St. Paul expected to live to see *the final judgment of the world*; of which he has here given so sublime a description—but, not to insist upon the Apostle's assertion, already noticed, that *the time of his departure*, or death, *was at hand*—if a little candor had been exercised, by those who have drawn this inferrence, from the Apostle's language; it would not have been a violent outrage upon good sense, to have supposed that the Apostle here meant—not *himself*—but those who should be *still living*, whenever that awful event should take place—or when, as the Apostle expresses it—*the Lord should descend from heaven with a shout—with the voice of the Arch-Angel, and with the trump of God.* This appears to be the more probable, as Dr. Benson has very justly remarked, upon the passage under consideration, that "It was usual among the Jews, to speak "in the same manner of the persons of their nation, though "they lived in very distant ages." †

It

* The word *God* is not in the original.

† The learned and ingenious Author of Letters on infidelity, (the late Bishop Horne), upon this language being objected to, has replied to it in the following masterly manner. "How common," says he, "is it for us, "when speaking of a Society—an Army—a Nation, to which we belong, "to say, *we* went, or came, or did such a thing, or *shall* do so and so; "though we ourselves, neither had nor shall have any *personal* concern in "the

It is very remarkable that the Apostle uses a similar language when describing the same awful event in 1 Cor. xv. 51. *Behold we shall not all sleep—but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump; for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised, incorruptible, and we shall be changed.* But, it is well worthy of notice, that though the Apostle enlarges with greater particularity and fulness, upon this subject, in this chapter, than in any other part of the sacred Writings; yet he is so far from giving any hint of *its near approach*, that he, on the contrary, expressly tells the Corinthians that *Christ must reign till he hath put all enemies under his feet.* It may therefore be fairly concluded, that St. Paul, in neither of the two cases, when he used the pronoun *we* meant that they who were then living, should see *the day of judgment in their own time*—but only intended to describe the persons, whoever they might be, who should happen to be alive, whenever that awful event should take place.

From the manner in which this matter concerning those *who were asleep in Christ*, is concluded, in the chapter under consideration; it should appear that this subject, as well as the former, was entirely dismissed when he says, ver. 18, *Wherefore comfort one another with these words*—or, with these considerations. But, it has so happened, that because the following chapter is introduced, by the expression—*the times and the seasons*—the Apostle has, pretty generally, been supposed to proceed to answer an enquiry of the Thessalonians concerning *the time* WHEN *the general judgment*, men-

" the matter; though the event happened before we were born, or is to happen after our decease. Thus in the Old Testament, Psalm lxvi. 6. *They went* " *through the water—there did we rejoice.* Hos. xii. 4. *Jacob found God in* " *Bethel; there he spake with us.* By the terms *we who are alive*, the Apo- " stle means doubtless, *those of us Christians* who shall then be alive. In " another place, 1 Cor. iv 4. he says, *We know that he who raised up the* " *Lord Jesus, shall raise up us also.* He could not believe contradictory " propositions, that he should *die*, and that he should *not* die." Page 283, &c.

See also a great variety of examples of this method of speaking, collected by Dr. Balcott—the most remarkable of which is the following: " When the " Israelites should be settled in the land of Canaan, in future generations, " Moses taught them to say—*The Egyptians evil intreated us and afflicted us,* " *and laid upon us hard bondage, and when we cried unto the Lord God of our* " *Father, the Lord heard our voice, and brought us forth out of Egypt.*" See Benson on 1 Thess. iv. 15.

tioned

tioned at the close of the preceding chapter, was to take place. And, if this be so, it will, indeed, be a very strong argument in favor of the charge of the Historian of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, that it is one principal design of this part of the Work to confute—to wit—that the Apostle, when he made use of the expressions *we* and *us*, conceived that *the day of judgment* was actually *very near at hand*; for he most certainly, does make use of a language which conveys an idea, which no criticism can do away, that the event to which he refers, whatever it was, was at no great distance. The Historian just mentioned, has expressly asserted, that "this expectation was countenanced by the "First Epistle of St. Paul to the Thessalonians." And, Mr. Locke, as has already been observed, says—"That the "Apostle looked on *the coming of Christ*," by which *coming*, he meant, *his coming to judge all mankind at the last day*, "as not far off, appears by what he says, 1 Thess. iv. 15. "and v. 6." Dr. Macknight, likewise, though one of the most strenuous advocates for the Application of the whole of the vth chapter, to *the day of judgment*, has remarked, that "the Apostle's description is the more affecting, that the "verbs are all in *the present time—so cometh—sudden de-* "*struction cometh*; representing *the certainty and instanta-* "*neousness* of its coming." And, to mention no more, Dr. Doddridge, in a note upon 1 Thess. v. 2. quotes Mr. Blackwall, as justly observing the remarkable emphasis of this passage. "A Thief comes upon people when they are "bound in sleep, and they awake in amazement and con- "fusion, being found unarmed, and in an helpless posture. "Pangs come upon a woman when, perhaps, she is eating, "drinking, or laughing, and thinks of nothing less than "that hour. And here, it is said—not that *the day of the* "*Lord will come*—but that it is *actually coming*, which in- "creases the awfulness of the representation." *

It has been already remarked, that *the coming*, and *the day of the Lord*, are expressions which were in frequent use, in antient prophecy, to denote the near approach of some great and remarkable temporal calamity. As therefore this Epistle was confessedly written before *the destruction of Jerusalem*, which happened a short time afterwards—as our Lord had

* See Doddridge in loc.

particularly

particularly predicted the accomplishment of this awful event, and had pointed out *the signs* of its approach, for the express purpose that they might *watch* for it, and be fully apprized of it—the presumption is, even previous to a critical enquiry, that the Apostle had his eye upon that event.

The language which our Lord made use of, in that Prediction, is particularly deserving of notice, not only on its own account, but more especially, on account of its apparent connection with the chapter under consideration; for that connection has not, as will presently, more fully be seen, escaped the notice of any of the Commentators upon the subject. In the xxivth of Matthew, he not only expressly predicted that *the destruction of Jerusalem* should be, in *that generation*—but that it should come upon *the Jewish nation* in a sudden and unexpected manner, when they were engaged in all the occupations of human life, and busied in transactions which plainly indicated, that they expected no such awful calamity to come upon them. Verse 27. *As the lightning cometh out of the East and shineth even unto the West; so shall also* the true nature of *the coming of the Son of Man*, the Messiah, *be*. And this is more particularly and fully explained in the 37th and following verses. *As the days of Noah were, so shall also* the true nature of *the coming of the Son of Man be; for as in the days which were before the Flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the Ark, and knew not until the Flood came and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be.* As they were thus apprized of the suddenness of that awful calamity—so they were likewise told, that though it was to be in *that generation*—yet the precise time of its approach was known to none. *Of that day and hour*, or season, *knoweth no man—no, not the Angels of Heaven, but my Father only*, and for that reason, especially, they were directed to *watch* for it. Verse 42. *Watch therefore; for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come*—and again—*Be ye also ready; for in such an hour as ye think not, the Son of Man cometh.*

Now it is deserving of particular notice, that the Apostle Paul, in the vth chapter of the Epistle to the Thessalonians, dwells, in a very particular and impressive manner, upon the Thessalonians being fully apprised of *the near approach of the day of the Lord*. He tells them that he had *no need to write to them*

them about it—that they knew perfectly that *the day of the Lord would so come, as A THIEF IN THE NIGHT*—that *they were not in darkness that that day should overtake them AS A THIEF*—that *they were all the children of light and of the day*, and that finally, *they were not of the night, nor of darkness*, and that therefore *they were not to sleep as others*, in careless security, as not apprehending, nor expecting the near approach of any calamity—but *to watch and be sober*. So again when the Apostle says—*They* i. e. those who were in this state of careless security, *should say peace and safety*, and that then *sudden destruction would come upon them as upon a woman with child*, and that *they should not escape*—it is hardly possible to make use of a language which was more appropriate to the near approach of some great national calamity.

When therefore the Apostle says, in the beginning of the chapter—*Now concerning the times and the seasons*—is it not, in the highest degree probable, independent of any critical examination of the meaning of the phrase in Acts i. 7. to which this language of the Apostle is generally referred—that he was about to describe—not *the end of the world*—or *the general judgment*, mentioned in the close of the preceding chapter—but *the destruction of Jerusalem!* If from the connection of the first verse, with the subsequent part of the chapter, this shall be considered, as probable; it will be strongly confirmed, by a critical examination of Acts i. 7. where the same phrase is made use of, and, as was just hinted, referred to by the generality of Commentators upon the chapter under consideration.

It will not, it may be presumed, be deemed unfair to state the opinion of Commentators upon the meaning of this verse, when they appear to have had no other object in view than to ascertain its genuine signification. This will be the more necessary, as some of them have, when commenting upon 1 Thess. v. 1. given a very different interpretation of it.

The learned Grotius, whose critical acumen has been universally allowed, in explaining what the Apostles meant by *restoring the kingdom to Israel*, says—Respiciunt Apostoli locum Danielis vii. 27. Restituis, id est, restituere partis in veteram dignitatem. And Mr. Le Clerc is not less accurate than concise, in his remark on this verse. "It appears by it,"

says he, "that the Apostles were not yet divested of their "Jewish ideas concerning the temporal reign of the Messiah." And on the 7th verse he says,—"As our Lord had not yet "ascended into heaven; from whence he should very soon "send to them the holy spirit, who should instruct them in "every thing—he did not directly answer their question, "but only told them, in general, that it was not for them to "know when he should reign in a more solemn and sensible "manner;—that is to say, from the time of the destruction "of Jerusalem." *

Dr. Benson explains our Lord's reply to the question of the Disciples, in the following manner: "'Tis not now "proper to acquaint you particularly with the exact time "and season which my Father hath at his own disposal, and "which he hath nicely calculated to the circumstances of "men and things; for such a discovery you are not at pre-"sent able to bear; but (as I have often told you) *the holy* "*spirit* shall be poured down upon you, and then ye shall "understand the nature of *my kingdom*; and shall be enabled "to spread it with great swiftnesse and successe; both through "*Jerusalem*, *Judea*, *Samaria*, and unto the uttermost parts "of the earth." †

Dr. Macknight has likewise sufficiently manifested in what manner he understood our Lord's answer, by the manner in which he has interpreted the question of the Disciples; for in his Note on Matt. xvii. 11. he says,—"*By the restoration* "*of all things*—the Jews seem to have understood the revival "of the kingdom of David, in their nation, to be accom-"plished by the assistance of Elias. Hence the Apostle's "question to Jesus before his ascension into Heaven. "Acts i. 6. *Lord wilt thou at this time restore the kingdom* "*to Israel?*" ‡

There appears to be much correctness, and good sense also, in Dr. Doddridge's explanation of these verses. "*They* (the

* It must not be concealed that Mr. Le Clerc adds, "that it relates also "to *the last Judgment*," and he says, "that it appears from the following "words." But let the Reader judge for himself, whether this is not said contrary to his usual judgment; for they are as follow—"*But ye shall receive* "*power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you, and ye shall be witnesses unto* "*me, both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the utter-*"*most parts of the earth.*" What has this to do with *the Day of Judgment?*

† See Dr. Benson's History of the first planting of Christianity, p. 16.

‡ See Macknight's Harmony on Luke xvii. 21.

"Disciples)

" Disciples) *therefore being come together*, full of expectation " that he had brought them thither with a view to some re- " markable transaction, asked him, saying, *Lord, wilt thou* " *at this time* break the Roman yoke from our necks, and " after all this confusion *restore the kingdom to Israel? But* " *he*, waving a direct answer to this curious question, and " leaving it to the spirit, which was shortly to be given, to " rectify the mistaken notions on which they proceeded in it, " only *said to them*, cease your enquiries at present on this " head; since *it is not* convenient *for you* now *to know those* " *times or seasons*, in which many remarkable prophecies " concerning my kingdom shall be fulfilled; *For the Father* " *hath reserved* them *in his own power*, under his own " direction and disposal, and hath not expressly determined " them in those predictions which certify the events them- " selves." See Doddridge in loc. *

But there is no one who appears to have given the sense of the question of the Disciples, and the answer of our Lord, with more accuracy and precision, than the late Bishop Pearce. " Take the Jews from under the Roman yoke, and give " them a king and kingdom of their own: They expected " still that Jesus was to be a temporal king." And on ver. 7, he says,—" Our Lord gives them no direct answer to their " question; but his words seem to imply, that when the " Holy Ghost was come upon them, they should then know " the nature of his kingdom, and till that time, they appear " not to have known it." See Pearce in loc.

It has already been observed, that some of these Commentators, when commenting on 1 Thess. v. 1, have given a very

* This learned Writer has given a turn to the meaning of the question of the Disciples which the History does not appear to justify, by making them express a surprize that our Lord should think of restoring the Kingdom " to the ungrateful People of Israel, who had been thus shame- " fully abusing and Crucifying him!" For it appears that the Disciples themselves, still expected him to deliver the Jewish Nation from the Roman yoke. And indeed the sense which Dr. Doddridge has given of the Disciple's views of this matter, is not consistent with his own Note at the foot of the page; for there he says, " They," to wit, his Disciples, " seem " to have expected, that when *the Spirit* was in so extraordinary a man- " ner *poured out*, the whole nation of the *Jews* would own him for the " *Messiah*; and so, not only shake off its subjection to the *Romans*, but " itself rise to very extensive, and perhaps, universal dominion." It is very strange that a Commentator should put two such very different, and opposite meanings, upon the same passage, and in the same page!

different sense of the phrase—*the times and the seasons*, though they have expressly and particularly referred this language of St. Paul to Acts i. 7. Thus Dr. Macknight, in his Paraphrase on 1 Thess. v. 1. says—"However, concerning the time of "the duration of the world, and the particular season at which "Christ shall come to judge mankind, &c. brethren, ye have "no need that I write unto you." And, in his Note on this "verse, he says, "*Times*, in this sense, denotes the ages of "the duration of the world;—and *Seasons*, the seasons, or "proper time for Christ's coming to judgment; for *times* "denote larger periods—but *seasons*, the parts of those "periods in which particular events take place."

Dr. Benson, in his Note on the verse under consideration, says, "As to the time—or proper season for Christ's coming "to judgment, it was unknown. So our blessed Saviour "himself declared, Mark xiii. 32. *Of that day and hour "knoweth no person, neither the Angels who are in heaven, nor "the Son—but the Father*, i. e. *the Father only*, as it is ex- "pressed Matt. xxiv. 36. And again, Acts i. 7. *It is not "for you to know the times and the seasons, which the "Father hath put in his own power.* In which last text, "we have the very words, *times and seasons*, which are "here made use of; and in the first perhaps, the same thing "is expressed in other words."

This language of Dr. Benson is the more extraordinary, as he was the professed and the zealous advocate for the unity of sense of Scripture, and as he has, very properly remarked, that "It is the business of the Commentator to find out, the "one true sense of Holy Scripture, and to set it before his "Reader, in as clear a light as he can." *

But the inconsistency of Commentators, in their endeavours to ascertain the meaning of the subsequent part of

* See Dr. Benson's Essay on the Unity of Sense of Scripture, prefixed to his Paraphrase, page 33, and Bishop Watson's Collection of Tracts. Again he says, "It appears to me that a critical interpreter of Holy "Scripture should set out with this, as a first principle; viz. that no "text of Scripture has more than one meaning: *That one true sense* he should "endeavour to find out, as he would find out the sense of *Homer*, or any "other antient Writer. When he has found out that sense, he ought to "acquiesce in it; and so ought his Readers too: unlesse, by the just rules "of interpretation, they can show that he has mistaken the passage; and that "another is the one, just, true, and critical, sense of the place." See page xlii.

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the chapter under consideration is, if possible, still more glaring. Thus Dr. Macknight, on the expression—*Ye have no need that I write unto you*, has this Note—"This, he "says, because, when he was with them, he had taught "them, *that it was not for them to know the times or "the seasons, which the Father had put in his own power:* "and had repeated to them Christ's injunction, to watch, "*because in such an hour as they thought not, the Son "of Man cometh.* Matt. xxiv. 43." So again in his Note on the words *so cometh, as a Thief in the night*, he says, "This is the comparison by which our Lord himself illustrated "the unexpectedness of his coming, Matt. xxiv. 43." And he adds, in his Note on the 3d verse, as has already been noticed, that "St. Paul's description is the more affecting "that the verbs are all in the present time—*so cometh: "sudden destruction cometh;* representing the certainty and "instantaneousness of its coming;" and for proof of this he quotes Luke xxi. 34. And yet, Dr. Macknight has, in express terms, asserted that "the whole Prophecy in the xxivth "of Matthew, (to which Luke xxi. is parallel), and every "expression in it, may, without the least straining, be "applied to the destruction of Jerusalem;" and, "that "our Lord has forbidden us to understand any part of this "Prophecy *primarily* of the destruction of the world; "having connected all its parts in such a manner, that the "things foretold, whatever they are, must have happened "in close succession."

Again, Bishop Newton, in his Dissertation on the general judgment, says, Vol. VI. page 319, that, "St. Paul, 1 Thess. "v. 2. to express the *uncertainty of it*, compares *the coming of "the day of the Lord*—to *the coming of a Thief in the night*, "alluding, probably to those words of our Saviour, Matt. "xxiv. 43, 44. *If the good man of the house had known in "what watch the Thief would come, he would have watched, "and would not have suffered his house to be broken up.*" And, a little lower, in the same page, he says,—"The Scrip- "ture asserts, not only that we are ignorant of the time and "season of the day of judgment—but that it is known only "to God, Matt. xxiv. 36. *Of that day and hour knoweth no "man*;" though he had, in his Dissertations on the Prophecies, in the strongest terms, asserted of this very verse, that "the consistence and connection of the discourse oblige us

"to

" to understand it *primarily* of the destruction of Jerusalem." But what is still more extraordinary, and is absolutely inexcusable in a Commentator—both Bishop Newton and Dr. Macknight, in their interpretation of the chapter under consideration, entirely lose sight of their distinction between the *primary* and *secondary* signification of the xxivth of Matthew, and the Reader is left to imagine, that the whole of it relates to *the end of the world*: Or, at least, no notice whatever is taken of this distinction, in considering the meaning of St. Paul, in the chapter in question. *

It is an excellent observation of the Bishop of Landaff, that " When men are desirous of forming systems, they are " apt to collect together a number of texts, which being taken " as abstract propositions, seem to establish the point; but " which, when interpreted by the context, appear to have no " relation to it. There is no greater source of error than this " practice; it has prevailed in the Christian church, from

* When the distinction between a *primary* and a *secondary* sense of the xxivth of Matthew and the parallel chapters was first noticed and commented upon, in pages 116 to 123 of this work; the Author had not seen the Bishop of London's Lectures on St. Matthew, in which, though he allows that the whole of it relates to *the destruction of Jerusalem*, he nevertheless has recourse to the distinction of *a primary* and a subordinate signification; for speaking of the xxivth of Matthew, he says, " that it contains " one of the clearest and most important prophecies, that is to be found in " the Sacred writings. The Prophecy is that which our blessed Lord deli- " vered respecting the destruction of Jerusalem, to which," says the Bishop, " I apprehend the whole of the chapter, in its *primary* acceptation, relates. At the same time," he says, " it must be admitted, that the forms of ex- " pression, and the images made use of, are, for the most part, applicable " also to the day of Judgment." But the learned Prelate has admitted that the boldest of these images, " the very same metaphors do frequently " in Scripture, denote the destruction of Nations, Cities, and Kingdoms." See Vol. II. page 158. " But," says the Bishop again, " there is a kind of " secondary object, runs through almost every part of the Prophecy," and he thinks that two important catastrophes are judiciously mixed together; but if the reader will take the pains—he will soon find that the most important parts of this Prophecy, are totally inapplicable to *the day of Judgment*, and that our Lord, by referring all the events before spoken of to *that generation*—appears absolutely to have forbidden such an application! Besides, the learned Bishop has said this Prophecy " contains one of the clearest Pro- " phecies that is to be found in the sacred writings"—but if so—why does he compare it with others that are so " extremely difficult to separate from each " other?" Surely these cases therefore are not parallel. But enough has been said upon this subject—let the judicious Reader decide which of the two opinions is most for the honor of the Sacred Writings; and which presents the fewest difficulties?

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" the earliest ages, and it still prevails. We owe to it, the
" corruptions of Popery, and that infinity of heresies which
" have so much debased the simplicity of Gospel Truth, and
" driven so many men of sense from embracing Christianity.
" Every one who will weigh the subject must perceive, the
" unfairness with which men usually proceed in forming
" systems in Theology. By stringing together detached sen-
" tences, an *Ausonius* may compel the chaste *Virgil* to fur-
" nish materials for an indecent poem;—and from the Bible
" itself, a system of impiety might, by such means, be
" extracted." *

To the same purpose Bishop Newton has observed, as has been formerly noticed, " that Men interpret Scripture according to
" their opinions, and frame not their opinions according to
" Scripture. They quote the Scripture, and one would think
" they understood at least what they quote; but alas, in their
" quotations they manifestly regard the bare words more than
" the meaning, and so that there is but something apposit in the
" sound, no matter how remote soever it is in the signification.
" Thus it is we read the Scriptures through coloured glasses,
" and then are confident that we see there what we really
" see not." †

This learned Prelate has, very justly remarked, " That these
" are not the faults of Scripture, but only of men interpreting
" Scripture;" and it behoves the Commentator and the Guide of others, above all men, to see that his quotations are apposite,—not only in *sound*, but in *signification*, and particularly, that he guard against the pernicious practice of introducing double meanings, which militate against the sober rules of grammar, of reason, and of good sense, and which, consequently could never have been intended by the Sacred Writers!

Under these restrictions, Scripture will be found to be the best interpreter of Scripture, and in no case, perhaps, will this be more evident, than in the fifth chapter of St. Paul's First Epistle, and his second chapter of his Second Epistle to the Thessalonians, when compared with the xxivth of Matthew; the latter affording a more easy solution of the principal difficulties of those chapters, than is to be found any where else.

* See Bishop Watson's two Sermons and Charge, pages 70, 71.
† See Bishop Newton's Dissertation on the Difficulties of Scripture, Vol. VI. pages 221, 222.

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This, it is probable, the Reader has been strongly inclined to believe, if not to be fully convinced of, from the examination of the first of these chapters. Indeed there is, so striking a reference in that chapter, to some great *national calamity*, that it has been thought, even by those who have imagined the Apostle to have been treating of *the day of Judgment*, in that chapter, that he interweaves with it, a reference to *the destruction of Jerusalem*. But Dr. Benson has very judiciously observed, that "particular expressions, in "any Author, may be variously applied, when detached "from their connection; but the current of the Apostle's "discourse here, is concerning only one grand and signal "day." And it is remarkable, that even Dr. Benson has repeatedly referred, in his Notes on this chapter, to Matt. xxiv. 36, 37, 43. Luke xxi. 34, 35, 36. and even to Luke xvii. 26, &c. to prove, that that grand and signal day is *the day of final judgment*. *

If the reasoning which hath hitherto been adopted, in endeavouring to ascertain the meaning of the fifth chapter of this Epistle, shall, upon examination, be found to be accurate and conclusive; it will, in the strongest manner, be confirmed, by a close attention to the second chapter of the Second Epistle to the Thessalonians, with which it is, on all hands, allowed to be intimately connected.

This chapter hath exercised the ingenuity of the most learned men in Christendom, and there is none, about the meaning of which, their opinions have been more divided; some applying it to *the apostacy of the Romish church*: while others have thought that it relates to *the destruction of Jerusalem*, and *the Jewish State*. Among those who have entertained this latter opinion are, the great Grotius, Le Clerc,

* It is not meant, in this instance, to charge Dr. Benson with inconsistency, in referring to these passages; for he actually thought they related to *the day of Judgment*. See pages 123, 124, of this work;—but it is remarkable the same references are made by Messrs. Beausobre and L'Enfant, and also by Mr. Le Clerc, as well as by most other Commentators. The former, in their Note on 1 Thess. v. 2. say, "Ils avoient appris ce que le Seigneur avoit dit là dessus à ses Disciples. Voy. Matt. xxiv. 42. And, on the 3d verse they say,—Il s'agit des impies & des profanes; en particulier des Juifs impenitens. Il y a là des allusions au deluge, & à la ruïne de Jerusalem. Voyez Luc. xvii. 26—30. The latter, in his Note on ver. 2. quotes Matt. xxiv 43, and has this remarkable expression—les Thessaloniciens l'avoient apris, i. e. The Thessalonians learnt *the coming of the day of the Lord* from Matt. xxiv. 43.

Hammond,

Hammond, Whitby, and Wetstein, and though a much greater majority of the learned apply it to the former, and it appears to be at present the prevailing opinion—yet still it is liable to some very formidable objections, which will fully justify a suspicion, that the Apostle's meaning has not yet been thoroughly understood, and consequently will be a sufficient apology for bespeaking the candid attention of the Reader to a critical and minute review of the Apostle's language in this chapter.

As it is obvious that the meaning of the whole chapter depends upon the meaning of the phrase *the coming of Christ*, in the first verse; it will be necessary to ascertain, with all possible precision, what that meaning is.

Bishop Newton has observed, that "The phrases of *the* "*coming of Christ*, and *the day of Christ*, may be understood, "either *figuratively* of his coming in judgment upon the "Jews, or *literally* of his coming in glory to judge the world. "Sometimes indeed they are used in the former sense, but," says he, "they are more generally employed in the latter, by the "Writers of the New Testament." And he, asserts, "that the "latter is the proper signification in this place as the context "will evince beyond contradiction."

With respect to the context, and the learned Bishop's observations upon it, they will presently be considered;—but if there be any truth in the representation, which, in the preceding pages, has been made, that the Gospel History is an History of the great controversy between Jesus and the Jews, concerning the true nature of the Messiah's character, and that *the destruction of Jerusalem* was a crowning proof, and a decisive completion of that controversy; it will necessarily follow, that till that controversy was finally decided, the leading idea of *the coming of Christ*, and that upon which his *coming to judge the world* depended, was *his coming in judgment* upon the Jews; for upon the accomplishment of that event, he had rested the issue of that controversy!

It is a most important circumstance that must not, by any means, be forgotten in the consideration of the meaning of the phrase *the coming of Christ*, as used by St. Paul, in the passage in question, that our Lord's prediction concerning *the true nature of his coming*, as *the Messiah*, was in answer to the question of the Disciples—*What shall be the sign of thy coming and of the end of the world*, or age,—i. e. as was ob-

served in the examination of the meaning of that chapter—of *his coming as the Messiah.* *

Now it is particularly worthy of the judicious Reader's Notice, that there is a remarkable resemblance between our Lord's language upon that occasion, and that of St. Paul, in the chapter under consideration, as will be seen by the following view of them.

Matt. xxiv. 4, 6.

Take heed that no man deceive you—See that ye be not troubled.

Mark xiii. 5, 7.

Take heed lest any man deceive you. Be ye not troubled.

Luke xxi. 8, 9.

Take heed that ye be not deceived. Be not terrified.

2 Thess. ii. 1, 2, 3.

Now we beseech you that ye be not soon shaken in mind—or be troubled.—Let no man deceive you by any means.

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* The Bishop of London, in his Lectures on St. Matthew, has observed that "the expressions here made use of, *the sign of thy coming*, and *the end* "*of the world*, at the first view, naturally leads our thoughts to the coming "of Christ at the day of Judgment, and the final dissolution of this "earthly globe. But a due attention to the parallel passages in St. Mark and "St. Luke, and a critical examination into the real import of those two "phrases in various parts of Scripture, will soon convince an impartial "enquirer, that by *the coming of Christ* is here meant, not his coming "to judge the world at the last day, but his coming to execute judgment "upon Jerusalem; see Mark xiii. 4. Luke xxi. 7. Matt. xxiv. 4, 5. xvi. "28. John xxi. 22. and that by *the end of the world* is to be understood, "not the final consummation of all things here below, but the end of *that* "*age*, the end of the jewish state and polity, the subversion of their City, "Temple, and Government." The Bishop adds, in a Note at the foot of the page, "The Greek word (here translated the world) frequently means "nothing more than *an age*, a certain definite period of time. See Matt. "xxiv. 6, 14. Mark xiii. 7. Luke xxi. 9. compared with ver. 20. Heb. "ix. 26." Lectures, Vol. II. p. 139, 140.

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Here, it must carefully be observed, that both in the Epistle and in the Gospels—the subject treated of, unquestionably is *the coming of Christ.* In the latter the question of the Disciples is *what shall be the sign of* THY COMING? In the former, the Apostle's language is—*Now we beseech you concerning* THE COMING OF CHRIST. And the cautions, in both, are almost the same *verbatim.* The language therefore, and the subject are so strikingly the same, that scarcely a single doubt can be entertained, that the one has an immediate and direct reference to the other, even though no other evidence of the fact could be produced. But when to this it be added, that our Lord, in a very particular and earnest manner, spoke of *the destruction of Jerusalem,* as declarative of *the true nature of his coming* as *the Messiah,* and particularly pointed out *the signs of its approach,* in order that they should make a deep impression upon the minds of those who should be living at the time, saying, in the most impressive language—*Behold I have told you before.*—When all these circumstances are maturely and attentively weighed—there can hardly exist a doubt in the mind of any impartial person that by *the coming of Christ,* in the passage under consideration, the Apostle had an immediate reference to *the destruction of Jerusalem.* And this meaning of the phrase *the coming of Christ* is strongly confirmed by the language which he had made use of in the fifth chapter of his former Epistle, that *the coming of the Lord* and *the day of the Lord* were at hand—as well as by that event being confessedly at no great distance. At least it must be admitted, that there is no inconsistency in the supposition, that the Apostle referred to that event.

"But," says Bishop Newton, "the proper signification "of the phrase *the coming of Christ* in this place is, his "coming in glory to judge the world, as the context will "evince beyond contradiction." And to prove this, he reasons as follows: "St. Paul himself," says he, "had planted "the church in Thessalonica; and it consisted principally "of converts from among the Gentile idolaters, because it "is said, 1 Thess, i. 9. *That they turned to God from idols, to "serve the living and true God.* What occasion was there "therefore to admonish them particularly of the destruction "of Jerusalem? Or why should they be under such agitations "and terrors upon that account? What connection had Ma"cedonia with Judea, or Thessalonica with Jerusalem? What

"share were the Christian converts to have in the calamities "of the rebellious and unbelieving Jews? and why should "they not rather have been comforted than troubled at the "punishment of their inveterate enemies? Besides, how "could the Apostle deny that the destruction of the Jews "was *at hand* when it was *at hand*, as he saith himself, "1 Thess. ii. 16. *And the wrath is come upon them to the "uttermost?* He knew, for our Saviour had declared, that "the destruction of Jerusalem would come to pass *in that "generation:* And what a ridiculous comfort must it be to "tell them, that it would not happen *immediately*, but would "be accomplished within less than twenty years? The phrases "therefore *of the coming of Christ* and *the day of Christ*," he concludes, "cannot, in this place, relate to *the destruction "of Jerusalem*, but must necessarily be taken in the more "general acceptation of *his coming to judge the world.*" *

Such is the reasoning of this learned Prelate, which, if it is plausible, is no more; for in reply to the question—What connection Macedonia had with Judea—or Thessalonica with Jerusalem? it seems sufficient to observe, that *the destruction of Jerusalem* was an event in which all Christians, however remote their situation, were materially and deeply interested, if only as a prediction, in which the credit of the Author of their religion, as a true Prophet of God, was at stake. It was, in fact, the crowning evidence of the truth of Christianity, and a complete decision of the important controversy, on which the whole Gospel History is founded, concerning *the true nature of the Messiah's character.* And while that event remained unaccomplished, that controversy could not, with strict propriety, be said to be decided; for, as was before observed, from Dr. Jortin, "Christ had foretold it so "expressly, that if he had failed, his Religion could not have "supported itself."

That the Apostle thought the Thessalonians interested in their destruction is plain from his mentioning it, in so particular a manner, and particularly from the reason which he assigned for it—to wit—that they were *the common enemies of mankind.* And the History of the Acts of the Apostles particularly states it as *a fact*, that their rage against the Christians at Thessalonica, was so great, that having driven some of

* See Newton on the Prophecies, Vol. II. pages 361, 362.

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their teachers from thence by the violence of their persecution, they followed them to Berea, and stirred up the people of that place against them. See Acts, xvii. 13.

It must indeed be acknowleged that these were reasons why they should rather be comforted than troubled, at the punishment of their inveterate enemies—but it does not appear that the Thessalonians were agitated at the thoughts of *their destruction*, but by the suggestions of certain evil minded persons. What these suggestions were, cannot perhaps with precision, be ascertained—but by the Apostle's saying, that *that day should not come except there came a falling away*—or an apostasy *first*, it should seem they had intimated its very near approach—when *as yet*, there were no such signs of it, as had been predicted, and for which they were directed to watch. It surely was not a ridiculous comfort to tell them, that *the signs* predicted by our Lord, would precede the event!

"But," says the learned Prelate, "how could the Apos-"tle deny that the destruction of the Jews was *at hand*, "when it was *at hand*, as he saith himself, 1 Thess. ii. 16. "*And the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost?*" To this question it may be replied, that here is a contradiction supposed, where there really is none; for the Apostle did not mean to say that it was *come*—that not being the fact, at the time when he wrote this Epistle—but only that it was *coming*—that is—as the Bishop himself seems to have interpreted it—that it would be accomplished within twenty years.

But perhaps this matter cannot be set in a clearer light than by the learned University Preacher, so often quoted in the course of this work. "Because," says he, "St. Paul assures "his Brethren, that the coming of Christ was *not at hand*, "—they (viz. the Commentators) have rashly represented "him as informing them, that it was therefore at a consider-"able distance: And, as one mistake frequently leads to "another, they have considered the Prophecy of *the man of* "*Sin* as describing a system of spiritual corruption, which "began to operate in the earliest ages of the church, and "which the revolution of seventeen centuries has not been "able to dispel. The former error has originated from not "duly attending to the true meaning of the word, *hast ren-*"dered *at hand*, (upon which Mr. Alexander has left us

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" the following very accurate Observation. Paraphrase, &c. " page 90.)" ' The word which is rendered *at hand*, is " not the same with that which is rendered so in other parts " of Scripture. And without doubt it should have been " rendered differently here; if for no other reason, to avoid " fixing a downright contradiction upon the doctrine of " the New Testament. It is a much stronger expression " than is used elsewhere of this event, and is applicable to " none but a present event, or one so very near, that accord- " ing to the common use of words, it may be said to be " present or just here.'

" If St. Paul had denied that the day of Christ was *ap-* " *proaching*, or that it might happen during the existence of " the Thessalonians, to whom he wrote, he would indeed have " directly contradicted what he had plainly intimated in his " First Epistle, but he means only to affirm, that the day was " not *at hand*;—that it would not happen within a week, " a month, or a year: And the expressions *emera en-* " *gizousa*, and *emera enestekuia*, would immediately excite, " in the mind of a Græcian, such very different and distinct " ideas, that they would require no comment or explanation " whatever.—The latter error, which I noticed as occasioned " by the former, is most decisively confuted by comparing " the passage we are considering with the opening of the " prediction: For as in the one our Apostle insinuates that " the day of the Lord might possibly overtake his Thessalo- " nian converts, yet afterwards asserts in the other, without " the least hesitation, that *that day shall not come except there* " *come a falling away first*;—it necessarily and unavoidably " follows, that this apostasy must have sprung up and " arrived at its maturity within the compass of a few years; * " and, that the application of it to the corruptions, which " have subsisted in the Romish church, must be abandoned as " a defenceless and extravagant conjecture." †

If the remarks which have already been presented to the Reader, upon the nature of *the coming of Christ*, and upon our Lord's particularly connecting *that coming* with the destruction of Jerusalem, shall, upon consideration, be found, in no degree to be invalidated by the objections of Bishop Newton,

* Vide Grotii Opera, Tom. III. p. 719.

† See Edwards's Sermon on the Predictions of the Apostles, pages 27—30.

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the way will be fully prepared for a farther examination of St. Paul's subsequent language, in the chapter under consideration.

Some light, it is probable, will be thrown upon the true meaning of the concluding part of the first verse, viz. *the gathering together unto him*—by referring first, to an early and important prediction concerning *the coming of the Messiah*, in the book of Genesis, Chap xlix. 10. *The sceptre sall not depart from Judah—nor a law-giver from between his feet, until Shiloh come, and unto him shall* THE GATHERING OF THE PEOPLE *be.* And secondly, to what was, perhaps, a repetition of, or at least an allusion to, the same prediction, by our Lord himself, Matt. xxiv. 31. *They shall gather together his elect, from the four winds—from one end of heaven to the other.* And the sense of both these passages seems to be equivalent to St. Paul's expression, in the Epistle to the Ephesians, Chap. ii. 14. namely,—*To the breaking down of the middle wall of partition between Jew and Gentile*, of which *the destruction of the Jewish polity* would, whenever it happened, be an important and remarkable evidence.

The Apostle having, as has been particularly noticed, guarded the Thessalonians against the deceptions of their adversaries, and exhorted them not to be excessively agitated by their false insinuations, goes on to correct them, by telling them that *that day*, viz. *the day of Christ*—or *the day of the destruction of Jerusalem*, would not come *except there came* AN APOSTASY—*or falling away* first.

Bishop Newton—Bishop Hallifax—Dr. Macknight—Mr. Zouch—and, in general, all the advocates for the application of St. Paul's Man of Sin to *the church of Rome*, are of opinion that the Apostasy here mentioned, was not of a civil—but of a religious nature—not a revolt from the government—but a defection from the true religion and worship of God—a departing from *the faith*, and from *the living God*—but they, none of them, appear to have given that critical and minute attention to the subject which it appears to deserve—or which can warrant an implicit acquiescence in their opinions.

The term *Apostasy*, when considered *abstractedly*, and without any relation to any particular subject, most unquestionably means, *a departure* from *any thing*, and all the passages in which this word is used, in the New Testament, plainly evince that it was considered in this light. Thus the Historian

Historian of the Acts of the Apostles, chap. xxi. 21. uses the word *Apostasy*—but to describe *its nature*, he found it absolutely necessary to make an addition to explain it: *Thou teachest all the Jews who are among the Gentiles* an *Apostasy* FROM MOSES:—So again St. Paul, in his first Epistle to Timothy, chap. iv. 1. says that, *in the latter times, some shall depart*—but the word here translated *to depart*, was not of itself sufficient to describe *the nature of the Apostasy*.—The Apostle, therefore, adds, in order that his meaning might not be mistaken, that it was *a departure*, or an Apostasy *from the faith*. Once more the Writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews chap. iii. 12. says—*Take heed brethren lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief* IN DEPARTING *from* THE LIVING GOD. Here also the word rendered *to depart* is defined by the addition which is made to it, which at once renders the Apostle's meaning clear and distinct.

From these examples, it appears unquestionable, that the word *Apostasy*, as made use of, by the Writers of the New Testament, neither signifies *a revolt from government*—nor *a defection from the true religion and worship*. It is neither *a civil*—nor *a religious* apostasy—but it is used in *the abstract sense* of A DEPARTURE *from any thing*, and consequently, it required *some addition*, accurately to define what it was. *

If this criticism upon the word *apostasy* be accurate—how is the Apostle's meaning, in the passage under consideration, to be ascertained, more naturally, than by considering *the nature of the coming of Christ*, with which it is in the closest manner connected? And this appears *in fact* to be the method which the Apostle himself has pointed out. *That day*—to wit—the day of the coming of Christ *shall not come except there come* A FALLING AWAY, or an apostasy, *first*.

If there is good reason, from what has been advanced, for supposing that *the coming of Christ*, in the chapter under consideration, has a reference to the destruction of Jerusalem, with which our Lord constantly connected the full manifes-

* Mr. Leigh, in his Critica Sacra, in a Note upon the word *Apostasy*, says—"Some interpret it, de defectione ab Imperio Romano; as Ambrose, "Hierom, Tertullian. Others, & more, de defectione à fide. Chrysost. "Oecum. Theoph. Theodoret. & August de Civit. Dei." Mr. Hedley, in his Note on this word, says—"Apostasia à fide defectionem generaliter "denotat, hic de defectionem Judæorum ab imperio Romano significare "videtur." But the judicious Reader will prefer genuine criticism to a thousand Authorities.

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tation of the true nature of *his coming* as *the Messiah*; it will follow, of course, that *the apostasy*, mentioned by the Apostle, as preceding it, was not of *a religious* but of *a civil nature*. And, a strong confirmation of this being the true meaning of the word *apostasy*, in this connection is, that our Lord, in his prediction of *the destruction of Jerusalem*, mentioned it as one of the first and most remarkable signs of its approach, that *they should hear of wars and rumours of wars*, and that *nation should rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom*; which, in the circumstances in which the Jews then were, as being in subjection to the Romans, and as conceiving that by *the coming of the Messiah*, they should be liberated from the yoke of subjection to them, necessarily implied their *apostasy* or *rebellion* against them. He likewise told them, that *there should arise false Christs and false Prophets, who should shew great signs, in so much that, if it were possible they should deceive the very elect*: plainly implying, by this last expression, that *the great body of the Jewish nation*, would actually be deceived by them, and would, in consequence of their deceitful artifices, be induced *to apostatize* or *rebel* against the Romans. It must likewise be particularly observed, that *this sign*, in the estimation of our Lord, was of such peculiar importance as not only to merit *a repetition*, but to require, a very strong and impressive memento to be added to it, ver. 25. *Behold I have told you before!* And that the nature of this memento might not be mistaken, our Lord immediately adds, ver. 26, 27, 28. *Wherefore if they*, viz. THE FALSE PROPHETS, *shall say unto you —Behold he*, the Messiah, *is in the desert—go not forth—Behold he is in the secret chambers—believe it not: for as the lightning cometh out of the east and shineth even unto the west, so shall also the* true nature of the *coming of the Son of Man* —the Messiah, for perspicuity, *be: for wheresoever the carcase is, there will the eagles*—the destroying armies represented by the eagles, *be gathered together*.

If it be true that Scripture, when properly applied, is the best interpreter of Scripture, and, if the history of the times when the Apostle wrote this Epistle to the Thessalonians, be attentively and impartially considered—the judicious Reader will probably be inclined to think that his mentioning *the Apostasy*, in connection with *the coming of Christ*, which is, on all hands, allowed *sometimes* to denote *the final demolition*

of the Jewish polity, is, when compared with our Lord's prediction of that event, a strong proof that he alluded to it; for, as Bishop Hallifax has observed, "It was actually effected within a few years after writing this Epistle."

In addition to these evidences of the true meaning of the Apostle, when he speaks of *the coming of Christ* and of *the apostasy* which was to precede it, drawn from our Lord's prediction of *the destruction of Jerusalem*, and from his connecting the full manifestation of *the true nature of his coming*, with the accomplishment of that event; it must be also observed, that there are some internal evidences, in the chapter itself, which are of no mean or trifling importance; for as the Apostle, in his former Epistle, had told the Thessalonians that he had NO NEED *that he should write to them*—that they KNEW PERFECTLY *that* THE DAY OF THE LORD *would so come as a thief in the night*—so he says here that THEY KNEW *what withheld the revelation of the Man of Sin*, and that *the mystery of iniquity was* ALREADY WORKING. Nay, he even reproves them for their inattention to what he had formerly said to them, upon the subject, when personally present with them, ver. 5. *Remember ye not that when I was yet with you I told you these things.* Nor must the extreme earnestness with which the Apostle introduces the subject, pass unnoticed. Ver. 1. Now WE BESEECH YOU *concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ—that ye be not soon shaken in mind—or troubled;* and at the close of the chapter he entreats them *to stand fast, and to hold the traditions which they had been taught, by him, whether in conversation—or in his Epistolary correspondence.* Now, what are all these circumstances, but so many strong *internal evidences* of the peculiar interest which the Thessalonians had in the matter, and that *the apostasy* which was to precede *the coming of Christ*, was to happen—not at the distance of many ages—but *in their own time.*

Of the same nature is that *extreme caution*, which is so observable, in the language of the Apostle, as not to have escaped the notice of those who have written upon the subject. Bishop Hallifax, in particular, says, "The Apostle "seems to use an uncommon degree of caution in forbearing "to mention what the lett—or hindrance was; as if he had "fears, or scruples about committing it to writing. And "granting the impediment to be, what the antient Fathers "universally

" universally conceived it, *the existence of the Roman empire*; " he had grounds for his fears, as it might be a sort of " treason against the majesty of Rome, even to suppose that " her imperial sovereignty should ever come to an end, or " be dispossessed by a power yet more oppressive than her " own." *

In like manner Mr. Zouch, in his attempt to illustrate some of the Prophecies, p. 177, says, " St. Paul mentions an " obstacle to the appearance of this Man of Sin, namely, as " the best Interpreters explain the passage—the dominion of " the Roman empire. It would have subjected him to the " charge of high treason against Rome if he had openly sug- " gested his apprehensions of the approaching fall of her " imperial sceptre."

But is not this carrying national jealousy to a prodigious and extravagant heighth? Can it be supposed that the Apostle should have used such an uncommon degree of caution concerning events which were not to happen till numerous ages should have passed away, and that, in a letter, which it was highly probable, would never have come to the emperor's knowledge,—or if it had, would either have been totally unintelligible to him,—or would have been considered, as the extravagant effusion of an enthusiast—or a madman? Is it not infinitely more natural to suppose, that the Apostle's extreme caution arose rather from the apprehension, that if he had spoken *in plainer terms* of the awful calamities which were coming upon the Jewish nation, and of the rebellion against the Romans, which was to precede it—the Thessalonians might have been exposed to still greater persecutions than they had already suffered from the Jews, and from which, it was well-worthy of the Apostle's attention, by all prudent means, to preserve them.

But besides the internal evidence arising from the prediction of our Lord concerning *the destruction of Jerusalem*, and from the chapter itself, that *the apostasy*, mentioned by the Apostle, was of *a civil nature*—or *a rebellion of the Jews against the Romans*—there is not wanting considerable external evidence that this was the meaning of the Apostle; for the testimony of Josephus—the Historian of the Jewish war, which ended in their destruction, is by no means to be

* See Bishop Hallifax on the Prophecies, pages 151, 152.

slighted; for speaking upon this subject, he says, "That "coming from Rome, in the time of Nero, he found THEN "the beginnings of innovations, and many much addicted to "apostasy from the Roman government." Again he says, "One Justus provoked the people to apostasy—or rebellion; "but John, the son of Levi, seeing some of them prone to "apostasy from the Roman government, endeavoured to keep "them to their duty." *

In these passages it must be observed, that Josephus makes use of the very same word with the Apostle, and what is particularly remarkable, upon this subject is, that he ascribes *the origin of the war*, which ended in their destruction, to their expectation of *the coming of the Messiah*. "That which "chiefly excited the Jews to the war was, an ambiguous "prophecy, which was also found in their sacred books, that "at that time, some one within their country should arise "that should obtain the empire of the world." †

St. Paul was thoroughly acquainted with the sentiments of the Jews concerning *the coming of the Messiah*. He knew that their prejudices, upon this head, had taken the deepest root in their minds, and it was easy to foresee, even if it had not been predicted, that their uneasiness under the Roman yoke, of which there are many evident marks in the history of the New Testament, would lead them to avail themselves of the slightest appearances of their darling expectations being realized. Under these circumstances, was it wonderful that St. Paul should tell the Thessalonians that *the day of Christ would not come except there came a falling away*—or an apostasy, *first*. It could be no impeachment of his character, either as a Writer—or an Apostle, that he should use the term *apostasy*, in this sense; even though it were true (which however appears not to be the case) that it is sometimes used in the New Testament to signify a revolt from the allegiance due to our Heavenly Master. If the circumstances of the case required such an application, and there were sufficient criteria to determine his meaning with precision—these are sufficient to the vindication of his character in both these respects; And, it will surely be allowed, that the Thessalonians were, at least, equally interested, in *the destruction of Jerusalem*,

* See Whitby in loc.

† This passage has already been cited—but the Reader, it is hoped, will readily excuse the repetition.

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as in *the apostasy of the Christian Church*, and in the full manifestation of the mystery of iniquity many ages after their decease!

But the contemplation of the particular features of the singular personage described under the character of *the Man of Sin*, and *the Son of Perdition*, will, probably, more fully confirm the judicious and intelligent Reader, in the opinion that *the apostasy*, mentioned by the Apostle, relates to *the apostasy*—or rebellion of *the Jewish nation* against the Romans.

Much time and useless labour appears to have been bestowed, by Critics and Commentators, in applying the description of this extraordinary character, to the schemes which they have severally adopted. Nor, have any of them all steered perfectly clear of difficulties. And perhaps it may be said, that none have strayed farther from the truth in their application of the characteristic features of the *Man of Sin*, than those who have espoused the opinion that the Apostle spoke *exclusively* of some person existing, in the time when he wrote this Epistle; which has probably contributed, not a little, to the general rejection of this opinion as indefensible! But, a careful attention to the same sources of evidence to which an appeal has, hitherto, been made, in the course of this work, will perhaps supply the deficiencies of these Writers, and shew, in a very striking point of view, that the features of *the Man of Sin* and *the Son of Perdition*, &c. are perfectly applicable to the Jews as *a nation*, and that, in fact, the Apostle had them *exclusively* in view, in his description.

It is remarkable that the Apostle, in his First Epistle to the Thessalonians, denominates the Jews—as *a nation*, as *the common enemies of mankind*, and as *filling up the measure of their iniquities*, as a vessel or measure, is filled up, till it can hold no more. In like manner our Lord, having pronounced, upon *the heads of the Jewish nation*, the severest woes, on account of their abominable crimes, says, almost in the very same language, Matt. xxiii. 32. *Fill ye up the measure of your fathers*, i. e. as the context plainly implies—of the iniquities of your Fathers.

The learned and ingenious Dr. Beattie, speaking upon the extreme flagitiousness of the character of the Jews, as a nation, says,—"The virtue of the Roman people was not in those "days exemplary. Yet, when we compare their manners,

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great question therefore is—whether St. Paul's language will fairly apply to them, as *a Nation;* for if it will—no one can possibly deny that it is, in every respect, in perfect harmony with the view which has been given, of the meaning of the phrase—*the coming of Christ*, and of *the apostasy*—or rebellion, which was to precede it. *

Thus far, at least, there appears to be no difficulty;—but how, it may be said—can the Apostle's subsequent language be applied to *the Jews?* What evidence is there, from the History of those times, either sacred or prophane, that this *Man of Sin*—this *Son of Perdition*, exalted himself above all that is called God—or that is worshiped, so that he, as God, sat in the Temple of God, shewing himself that he was God?

In answer to these questions—let it be observed, that the most able Commentators—not excepting those who were decidedly of opinion that *the Church of Rome* is here described, seem to be agreed, that by *the Man of Sin exalting himself above all that is called God—or that is worshipped*, is meant, *his exalting himself above all other temporal dignities.* Dr. Benson has observed, that "Princes and Magistrates are, in Scripture, sometimes called Gods. See Psalm lxxxii. ver. 1, 6, 7. cxxxix. ver. 1. &c. And," he says, "'tis well known that, "in the Apostle's days, *Sebastos* was the Greek name, or "title of the Roman Emperor. See Acts xxv. ver. 21, 25. "and xxvii. ver. 1. If therefore we understand *Sebasma* of "*the imperial dignity*—then the Apostle rises in his discourse, "and prophecies that the Man of Sin would exalt himself, "not only above every one that is called *a God*—or temporal "Potentate—but even above the majesty and dignity of Cæsar "—the Roman Emperor himself—the highest of earthly Gods. "Accordingly, it is in the singular number *Sebasma*, and

* It has, indeed, been said, that the phrase *the Man of Sin*, is applicable only to one single person, in his official capacity, meaning thereby, the Bishop—or Pope of Rome; but this appears not by any means to be evident. It is a curious observation of Bishop Hurd, that—"Many of the "Popes are said to have been, and," says he, "for any thing I know, "*may* have been, *Saints*, in their private morals: So that when we apply "the term, *Antichrist*, to them, we do not mean to stigmatize their *persons*, "but merely to express the sense which the Prophecies lead us to entertain "of the communion, over which they preside; though they may not ex- "emplify in their own conduct, or not in any remarkable degree, the "avowed principles of that communion." See Hurd on the Prophecies, Vol. II. page 56. 5th Edit.

"not

" not *Sebasmata*. The Apostle has not spoken out so plain " as to say *Sebastos*, CÆSAR, but as he hath connected " *Sebasma* with every one that is called a God, he hath " directed us how to understand him, and spoken as plain, as " it was then proper to do." See Benson in loc. and in his " Dissertation on the Man of Sin, page 182.

Bishop Hallifax, in his Sermon on *the Man of Sin*, says, page 148, that " By opposing and exalting himself above all " that is called—a God—or that is worshipped, may only be " meant, that the Man of Sin should exercise a super-eminent " jurisdiction over the Kings and Princes of this world." In like manner, Dr. Duchal, in his observations upon the Apostle Paul's description of *the Man of Sin*, says, " This " person is said to oppose and exalt himself above all that is " called a God—or is worshipped. These are, in Scripture, " called Gods, as they are clothed with dominion and autho- " rity over others, in which they bear a faint resemblance of " that power, that ruleth over all. To those Gods on earth " —the Man of Sin opposeth himself, and not only refuseth " all submission to them—but exalteth himself above them— " and above all that is worshipped—the very highest orders " and ranks of mankind."

To the like purpose Bishop Newton—having quoted the words—who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God—or that is worshipped, says, " This is manifestly " copied from Daniel: *He shall exalt himself, and magnify* " *himself above every God, and speak marvellous things* " *against the God of Gods.* The features, you see, exactly " resemble each other. He *opposeth and exalteth himself* " *above all*, above every one *that is called God, or that is* " *worshipped*—alluding (by the word made use of) to the " title of the Roman Emperors, *Sebastos—august* or venera- " ble. He shall oppose, for the Prophets speak of things " future as present; shall oppose and exalt himself not only " above inferior magistrates, who are sometimes called *Gods*, " in holy writ, but even above the greatest Emperors, and " shall arrogate to himself divine honours." *

* See Newton on the Prophecies, Vol. II. pages 368, 369. The following is the Note of Mr. Hardy upon the expression—*Who* " *exalteth himself above all that is called God.* " De Judæis hoc verum, " quorum scribæ se extulerunt supra magistratus, 2 Pet. ii. 10. Jud. viii. " et jus, et imperium Cæsaris iniquum, et illicitum esse docebant."

 These

There is no one who is at all acquainted with the history of the Jews as *a nation*, in the time of our Saviour, and with the account which the Christian Scriptures have given of them, who can possibly be ignorant that it was a peculiar feature of their national character that when they looked for *the coming of the Messiah*—they expected him to appear under the character of *a temporal Prince*, whose office it would be, not only to rescue them from the dominion which they were then under to *the Romans*—but to raise them to *an universal empire over the whole world*—to exalt them even above the majesty and dignity of Cæsar—the Roman Emperor himself—the highest of earthly Gods.

That the Jews, as *a nation*, expected to be placed *precisely* in this situation, is *a fact* which not only has never been disputed—but has universally been acknowledged, by all descriptions of Writers among Christians. In the early part of this work, various passages from different Writers, were laid before the Reader to prove this—to which are now added the following passages to the same purpose, from Dr. Paley and Dr. Lardner. "This people, the Jews," says the former of these Writers, "with or without reason, had worked "themselves into a persuasion that some signal and greatly "advantageous change was to be effected, in the condition of "their country by the agency of a long promised Messenger "from Heaven. The rulers of the Jews, their leading sect—"their priesthood, had been the authors of this persuasion "to the common people. So that it was not merely the "conjecture of Theoretical Divines—or the secret expectation "of a few recluse Devotees; but it was become the popular "hope and passion, and, like all other popular opinions, "undoubting and impatient of contradiction. They clung "to this hope, under every misfortune of their country, "and with more tenacity as their dangers, or calamities "increased." *

* See Paley's Evidences, Vol. I. pages 22, 23. The change mentioned by Dr. Paley, he has fully explained, by the following references to Suetonius and Tacitus, formerly quoted. "Percrebuerat oriente toto vetus "et constans opinio esse in fatis, ut eo tempore Judæa profecti rerum poti-"rentur." Vespasian. Cap. 4—8.

"Pluribus persuasio inerat, antiquis sacerdotum literis contineri, eo ipso "tempore fore, ut valesceret oriens, profectique Judæâ rerum potirentur." Tacit. Hist. lib. v. cap. 9—13. Ibid. Note.

"The

" The continued expectation of the Messiah," says Dr. Lardner, " as a worldly king and conqueror, and their un-
" easiness under the Roman yoke, were *the immediate* occa-
" sions of their rebelling against the authority to which they
" were then subject. And the same principles that induced
" them to reject and crucify Jesus, brought upon them their
" utter and final ruin." *

Here then, it should seem was the very characteristic feature of *the Man of Sin*, described by the Apostle—*who exalted himself above all that was called a God—or that was worshipped*—above the imperial majesty and dignity of Cæsar himself—the highest of earthly Gods. And what is particularly worthy of the notice of the judicious and attentive Reader is, that this description of the Apostle is, in the closest manner connected with *that coming* of the Messiah with which *the Jews*, though fallaciously, connected their expectations of universal empire, and for the sake of obtaining which, they apostatized, or rebelled against the Romans. Is it necessary to say a word more to render it, in the highest degree probable, that the Apostle meant to describe this distinguished trait of the character of the Jewish nation?

" But allowing," says Bishop Hallifax, " that by *opposing*
" *and exalting himself above all*, or every one, *that is called a*
" *God—or that is worshipped*—may be only meant, that *the*
" *Man of Sin* should exercise, a super-eminent jurisdiction
" over the Kings and Princes of this world; it must still be
" acknowledged, that when it is added besides, of this
" Monster of Iniquity, that he should assume to himself a
" sovereignty never before asserted—or so much as thought
" of by any earthly Monarch, however absolute in other in-
" stances,—should aspire to rule as God, in the Temple or
" Church of God; and in consequence of his usurped
" occupancy of that holy place, should presume to *shew*
" *himself that he is God*; arrogating more than human ho-
" nours, and claiming to partake of the incommunicable at-
" tributes of the Supreme Being, by diabolical pretences to
" lying wonders, calculated to impose only on those who
" believe not the truth, but have pleasure in unrighteousness:
" These things are utterly incompatible with all our notions

* See Lardner's Jewish Antiquities, Vol. I. page 70. Quarto.

"of secular dominion, and must be conceived as the undoubted marks of an *Ecclesiastic* Tyranny." *

Although there appears to be no reason to doubt the propriety of the learned Bishop's conclusion; that St. Paul's description of the *Man of Sin* contains in it, the undoubted marks of *an Ecclesiastical Tyranny*—yet it is unquestionable that the Church of Rome was not the first to arrogate to itself such a tyranny, and to aspire to rule as God, in the Temple of God—for *the Gospel History* will furnish abundant evidence that *the Jewish nation* were their precursors in the infamy of having assumed a sovereignty which had all the marks of *an Ecclesiastical Tyranny*.

The resemblance of the portrait drawn by the Apostle, it will readily be allowed, is remarkably striking as exhibited in the Romish church. And, indeed, it is ever to be lamented that there were, in that church, so many melancholy and affecting proofs of an enormous spiritual tyranny having existed in it, and such as must be an eternal monument of *the Anti-christian spirit*, by which she has been governed. But were not the Jewish Rulers in our Saviour's time actuated by the same spirit? Did not our Lord tell them to their faces that they *shut up the kingdom of heaven against men*, and that they would neither go in themselves, nor suffer others who were entering to go in? Are we not told that when St. Paul had informed the Jews of his having received a commission to go to the Gentiles—that they no sooner heard this declaration than they immediately *lifted up their voices and said—Away with such a fellow from the earth; for it is not fit that he should live.* Nay, did not St. Paul himself call the Jews, as *a Nation—the common enemies of mankind*, and that in a letter addressed to these very Thessalonians? And what was the reason which he gave for his so stigmatizing them? Was it not because they forbad the Christian Teachers, and among the rest ST. PAUL, *even to speak to the Gentiles, that they might be saved?* And what was this but *Spiritual Tyranny* and usurpation in *the extreme*, and arrogating a despotic sovereignty over the minds of men? Nay, could it be carried farther than this, even by the Romish Church, in the plenitude of her *Anti-christian Tyranny?* And is it wonderful that St. Paul should have expressed his unqualified sense of the

* See Hallifax on the Prophecies, pages 143, 144.

iniquity

antiquity of such gross usurpation of the prerogative of God, especially as he had himself so frequently been *the victim* of their tyranny? What was *sitting in the Temple of God, and shewing themselves as if they were God*, if confining the divine favor *exclusively* to themselves, and dictating the terms of salvation, was not? If the Jews could have had their will—or could have accomplished their purpose, either by force or fraud—would not the whole Gentile world have remained to this day in the darkness of heathenism, and instead of worshiping *the one living and true God*, been, at this moment, worshipping stocks and stones, the works of their own hands? In a word—Is not the whole history of the Acts of the Apostles an irrefragable proof that this characteristic feature of *the Man of Sin*, belonged to none, with more strict propriety, than to *the Jews as a nation*?

The learned Dr. Benson, in his Dissertation on the Man of Sin, page 176, readily allows that *the Scribes and Pharisees* did arrogate to themselves a divine authority, and therefore might be said *to sit in the temple of God*; "Yet," he says, "the Apostle could not foretel that as *a future event*. They "did so already, and for some time they had done so." But has this learned Writer distinguished, with sufficient accuracy, what the Apostle speaks of *as future*, and what had already taken place? The Apostle Paul most unquestionably speaks of *the apostasy* which was to precede *the coming of Christ*—or rather the full manifestation, by *the destruction of Jerusalem*, of *the true nature of his coming*, as yet *future*. He speaks of *the lawless one*, as *yet* to be revealed: But, as if he meant accurately to distinguish what *then existed* from what was *yet future*—he speaks of *the Man of Sin* as then actually *opposing and exalting himself above all that is called God—or that is worshipped—and as sitting in the temple of God*, &c. for the verbs are, in the original, as well as in the translation, all in *the present tense*. It seems therefore to have been an hasty and unwarrantable assertion that, "the Apostle is all "along to be understood in the future tense.

It may, indeed, possibly be objected to the interpretation here adopted, particularly, as it respects the Jews grasping at *universal empire*—that they never did attain to it, and that therefore they could not have been the objects intended by the Apostle. But to this it may be replied, that it may, fairly, be doubted, whether the Apostle's language amounts

to

to a declaration that they had actually attained to that empire; for his words are, *who opposeth and exalteth himself*—or rather, who is opposing and exalting himself. And it is not a little remarkable, that that able Scholar and judicious Divine Dr. Jortin, when referring to this very passage says, * "That verbs active sometimes signify a design and endeavour to perform a thing, whether it be accomplished or not." Dr. Benson has likewise said that, "If *the Man of Sin*, should *attempt* to exalt himself above every Potentate, it would answer this prediction, though some should with difficulty, or not at all, submit to him." †

But to proceed—The Apostle goes on, in the 6th verse, to tell the Thessalonians that they were well acquainted with the hindrances of the full revelation of the Man of Sin, &c. *And now*, says he, *Ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time.* There seems to be some difficulty in ascertaining, with precision, what it was to which the Apostle here alludes—as *with-holding* ‡ the full revelation of *the Man of Sin*—but this difficulty appears not to be peculiar to the hypothesis here espoused. One thing, however, is certain, viz. that though we may be ignorant what *this restraining power* was—the Thessalonians, most certainly were not. And it is a remarkable circumstance in the Apostle's account of the matter, that he expressly asserts of *the Mystery of Iniquity*—that it was *already working*, § though he

* See Jortin's Discourses on the Christian Religion, 2d Edit. p. 185.

† See Benson in loc.

‡ The following Note of Mr. Hardy is well worth the perusal. "*Et nunc quid detineat.* sc. moretur adventum Christi—nempè Romanus imperator; sicut sæpe neutrum nomen etiam de personis ponitur. Mens Apostoli est, non priùs revelandum esse Antichristum, quàm deletum ac dissolutum sit Romanum imperium; id vero apertè Paulus dicere noluit, nè calumniam pateretur, quasi Romano imperio, quod æternum fore sperabat, malè optaret, et occasionem præberet persequendi Christianos."

§ It is difficult to reconcile what Bishop Hallifax has said upon this subject; for in page 141, he has observed, "that the beginnings of the Apostacy were discernible when St. Paul wrote his Second Epistle to the Thessalonians"—but in page 163 he says, that "at the time this prophecy was written by St. Paul, there was not, and had not been, the slightest vestige of a power resembling that foretold, in any part of the then known world;" and he adds—"judging from appearances only—there was not the least likelihood that any such should arise, much less that it should originate in a Church so averse to worldly Grandeur, as that of Christ."

who

who let would continue to let, till he should be taken out of the way.

The conjecture of the learned Dr. Whitby concerning the power which *let*—or hindered *the full revelation of the Man of Sin* by the rebellion, or Apostasy, of the Jews against the Romans, appears to have much probability in it, and as such, it is here presented to the Reader, for his candid and attentive perusal. After having mentioned the opinion which has been espoused by the advocates for the application of St. Paul's language to *the Church of Rome*, he says, "My conjecture is this. "*He who now letteth*, i. e. the Emperor Claudius, *will let, till he* "*be taken away*, i. e. he will hinder the Jews from breaking "out into an open rebellion, in his time, they being so signally "and particularly obliged by him, that they cannot for shame, "think of revolting from his government; for he had made "two Edicts in their favour; the one concerning the Alex- "andrian Jews, to this effect, that the just Jews should "suffer nothing because of the madness of Caius, who would "be worshipped as a God, and that they should have liberty "to observe their own laws and customs. And that other "Edict, in which he gives them liberty over his whole Em- "pire, without molestation to observe their own laws and "customs, declaring that he did it because he judged them "worthy of that favour, for their affection and fidelity to "the Roman Government.

"After his death, the affairs of the Jews, saith Josephus, "became worse and worse, not only by reason of those Ma- "gicians who deceived the people, and of those Thieves who "stirred them up to the war against the Romans, persuading "them not to be subject to them, but because Nero sent a "letter to Portius Festus, Governor of Judea, by which the "Jews were deprived of their equal share of government "in Cæsarea; whence, saith Josephus, was the rise of all "our calamities; the Jews persisting still in sedition, till "they broke out into the war. In the seventh of Nero, "Albinus succeeded Festus, then dead, who, saith Josephus "was one who exceedingly wasted the country, and laid the "seeds of their future captivity. In the 10th of Nero, "Gessius Florus succeeded him, who brought many cala- "mities upon the Jews, saith Josephus, which having "tragically represented, he concludes thus,—What shall I "say more? For it was this Florus, who compelled us to

"the

" the War against the Romans, which began in the 12th " of Nero." *

This is a very remarkable passage, and deserves particular attention; for besides that it assigns a very rational and probable cause for the delay of *the apostasy*—or rebellion of the Jews against the Romans; it likewise points out, pretty strongly, by what means *this apostasy* was at length effected. " After the death of Claudius, the affairs of the Jews became " worse and worse by reason of *those Magicians who deceived* " *the people.*" Here the judicious and attentive Reader cannot fail to recollect *the prediction* of our Lord that *many should come in his name*, i. e. in the name of the Messiah, *and should deceive many*. And again, ver. 24. *There shall arise false Christs and false Prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders, insomuch, that if it were possible, they shall deceive the very Elect.* Josephus, it has before been observed, had declared that what chiefly excited the Jews to the War, was *the expectation of the Messiah as a temporal deliverer*, and this, it is probable, was what the Magicians made use of to deceive the people, and to prevail upon them to rebel against the Romans.

It must not pass unnoticed, that the learned Dr. Benson, though a strenuous advocate for the application of St. Paul's *Man of Sin* to the Church of Rome, in his Note upon the phrase—*the Mystery of Iniquity doth already work*, refers his Readers to Matthew xxiv. 4, 24. which he has, in the most express and unequivocal terms, asserted, relates to what was to come to pass during that generation, and cannot relate to *the day of Judgment* and *the end of th eworld.* In the former sense, he says, " it was fully accomplished and does not now remain to " be accomplished. †

To this testimony of an opponent of the opinion here espoused, may be added that of the learned Dr. Whitby, who appears to have had very clear conceptions of the causes

* The Note of Mr Hardy is remarkable. " *Tantùm modò qui detinet,* " *vel obstat* (sub obstabit) *usquedum è medio sublatus fuerit.* Ellipsis sic " supplendâ, et hoc modo construi debet, *donec amoveatur*, nempè per mor- " tem à medio tollatur, *is*, sc. Claudius imperator, *qui hactenus moratur*, " illud consilium, quicquam contra Romanum imperium seditiosè moli- " endi, et populum Judaicum ad defectionem concitandi.

† See Benson's Essay on the Unity of sense of Scripture prefixed to his Paraphrase p. xxxx.

which

which led to the accomplishment of our Lord's prediction. "The Jews," says he, "had already imbibed their pernicious principle that it was not lawful to pay tribute to "Cæsar—or to be subject to any other government under "God. They had already made some seditious attempts, "not only in Babylon, but in Judea, under Theudas Gaulonites, and had also been incited farther to do so, by one "Dortus and his associates, who persuaded the multitude "*to revolt* * *from the Romans.* Josephus doth also inform "us, that before that time there were many tumults in "Judea, and that *the time* prevailed with many to usurp the "kingdom.

"This *Mystery of Iniquity*," saith Dr. Lightfoot, "cannot "be understood but of *the Jewish Nation*, and so it is explained again and again by St. John, saying—*This is the "last hour, and as you have heard that Antichrist cometh—"so now are there many Antichrists; by which we know this "is the last hour.* 1 John ii. 18. and ch. iv. 3. *Every spirit "that confesseth not Jesus Christ, who is come in the flesh, "is not of God; and this is the spirit of Antichrist. This "is the Deceiver and the Antichrist.* Here therefore is a "plain account of *the working of the Mystery of Iniquity* in "*the false Christs and Prophets* of the Jewish nation, who "also were the great incendiaries to, and agents in, the "apostacy of that nation from the Roman government." †

The Apostle Paul, having stated to the Thessalonians that *the let*—or hindrance, whatever it was, would be removed—or *taken out of the way*, goes on to observe, that it would be followed by *the destruction of the Man of Sin.* Ver. 8. *And then shall that wicked*—or as the original word properly signifies—that lawless one, *be revealed whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit*—or rather with *the breath of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming.*

It has repeatedly been observed, in the course of this work, and that not without the strongest and most convincing proof

* It is the same word in the original which the Apostle makes use of to denote the *Apostasy*, connected *with the coming of Christ.*

† Mr. Hardy, in his Greek Testament, has the following remarkable Note upon the working of *the Mystery of Iniquity.* "*Mysterium iniquitatis* "*jam nunc operatur*, vel *cuditur*, nam *energeitai* vel activè, vel passivè "sumi potest, sensu prorsus eodem manente. Et hoc de Judæis, de quibus exponitur, 1 John ii. 18. et iv. 3. nec de aliis quibus vis intelligi "potest.

of the fact, that our Lord connected the crowning evidence of *the true nature of his character* as *the Messiah* with *the destruction of Jerusalem.* It has also been observed, that if the prediction of Jesus concerning *the destruction of Jerusalem* had not been accomplished—the controversy concerning *the nature of his coming* as *the Messiah*, viz. that it would be *in clouds*—or in the execution of vengeance, as *in the days of Noah* and *of Lot*, instead of *his coming* to raise them to universal empire, would have been completely at *an end*, and he would justly have been convicted out of his own mouth, of his having been *an Impostor.*

Here then particular attention must be given to *the connection* of the Apostle's argument. In the first verse, he tells the Thessalonians that he was speaking to them of *the coming of Christ*, and in the third verse, he tells them that *that day should not come except there came* A FALLING AWAY—or an apostasy *first, and that Man of Sin—the Son of Perdition, be revealed.* * In the sixth and seventh verses, he informs them of certain hindrances which, for a time, would prevent *the full revelation of the Man of Sin*, and that when they were *taken out of the way*—then, *that wicked*, or lawless one, *would be revealed, whom the Lord should consume with the spirit of his mouth, and destroy with the brightness of his coming.*

If the evidence which has been offered to the Reader's attention be satisfactory, that the phrase *the coming of Christ*,

* It was omitted to insert the Note of Mr Hardy in its proper place, upon the meaning of *the coming of Christ*—but the candid Reader will excuse its having a place here. "Quoad adventum Domini, quantum ad articu-"lum apud vos controversum, nempè de adventu Christi attinet. *Pa-"rousia* Christi de judicio Christi in Judæos intelligi potest, secundùm "locutionem scripturæ satis usitatam. Amant quoque sacri scriptores "easdem voces usurpare de judicio universali, et de judicio in populum "Judaicum, quod hoc sit illius imago. Sed de die novissimo hic agi "liquet, ex collat. 1 Thess. iv 15, 16, 17. ubi de finali adventu Christi "scribit, qui cum resurrectione conjungitur."

Whoever will examine Mr. Hardy's Notes upon this Chapter, with a critical attention, cannot fail to discern a considerable degree of inconsistency in them. "*The Apostasy*," he allows, "seems to signify *the defection of the* "*Jews from the Roman Empire. The Mystery of Iniquity*," he says, "is to "be expounded of the Jews, and can be understood of no one else;" and even *the brightness of his coming*, he understands of *the destruction of the Jews by the Romans*, and yet he here says, "*the coming of Christ* means *his final advent!*

has

has a relation to *the true nature of his coming* as *the Messiah*, which would be decisively and finally determined by *the destruction of Jerusalem*—the Apostle's idea that *this Man of Sin*, this lawless one, would be destroyed, in—or by *the brightness of his coming*, will be found, upon mature consideration, to be most strikingly forcible, and to harmonize, most exactly, with our Lord's declaration, in the xxivth of Matthew, and the xviith of Luke—that *the destruction of Jerusalem* would be a most bright and splendid display of *the true nature of his character* as *the Messiah*, in opposition to the manner in which *the Jewish nation* expected him to come, viz.—as *a temporal Prince*, to render them the Masters and the Lords of the world. St. Matthew says, chap. xxiv. 27. *As the lightning cometh out of the east and shineth even unto the west—so shall also* the true nature of *the coming of the Son of Man*, the Messiah, for perspicuity, *be*. St. Luke also says, chap. xvii. 24. *As the lightning that lightneth out of the one part under heaven, shineth unto the other part under heaven; so shall also the Son of Man be in his day*—i. e. in *the day* when the true nature of *the coming of the Son of Man is revealed*, as is more plainly stated in verses 29 and 30. *As it was in the days of Lot—Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed.* Both Matthew and Luke therefore appear to express the precise idea of the Apostle of *his coming in a bright and splendid manner*, and are an admirable commentary upon the Apostle's meaning. *

If upon examination this shall be found to be the true meaning of the phrase *the brightness of his coming*—it will not perhaps be very difficult to ascertain, with tolerable precision, the sense of the following verse. *The coming of the Messiah*, the Jews conceived would be, as *a temporal Prince*, to lead them to conquest and to empire. With this persuasion they rebelled against the Romans—encountered unparallelled miseries, in the expectation of his appearance, and grasped, with avidity, at the smallest pretensions to *the character of the Messiah*, in proportion as their affairs grew more desperate. To support these pretensions, they had recourse to the most flagitious arts of deception—to *signs and lying wonders, and to all the deceivableness of unrighteousness*,

* The following is the Note of Mr. Hardy upon this passage. " Notat *adventum ejus illustrem*, et excidium Judæorum per Romanos.

The design of the Apostle therefore seems to have been to point out in what manner *the Jewish nation* would endeavour to support the pretensions of *the false Messiah*. And as he had before said that *the mystery of iniquity was already working*—he says here, that they would endeavour to effect the coming of this *false Messiah*, by the energy of Satan *with all power and signs, and lying wonders*. *

This language of St. Paul has so striking a reference to that of our Lord in the xxivth of Matthew and the parallel chapters, that there is scarcely a single Commentator who has not observed it. They may truly be said to be *a cloud of witnesses* to its connection with those chapters,—and to such witnesses, in such a cause, no one surely can object. Among these, the most remarkable and the most deserving of notice are Dr. Benson and Dr. Macknight. The former, in his note on the Apostle's expression—*that they may believe a lye*, refers, among a multitude of other passages, to Matt. xxiv. 5, 11, 23. And the latter, in his note on the verse under consideration says, "Our Lord himself foretels that "*false Christs and false Prophets would shew great signs* "*and wonders, insomuch that, if it were possible, they* "*would deceive the very Elect.*" † Nor must it be omitted to be observed, that Mr. Kett, having quoted our Lord's words—*There shall arise false Christs*, &c. says, "Josephus "makes use of the exact words, *signs and wonders*, when "speaking of *the false Prophets* foretold by our Saviour. "*If they shall say he is in the desert, go not forth.* Josephus "says, they drew many people after them into the desert." ‡

* Our Translators have found it necessary, in order to distinguish THE COMING *which was after the working of Satan* from *the coming of Christ*, to insert the words *even him*. Mr. Hardy's Note upon this passage appears to be judicious. "*Cujus est adventus.* nempè *illum, cujus est adventus, Est*, pro, "*erit*, per enallagen præsentis pro futuro. Relativum hic non ad proximè "præcedens, *autou*, sed ad remotius illud *o anomos*, more Hebræorum, "referri debet, sicut ex re ipsâ liquet."

† It has already been repeatedly observed that both Dr. Benson and Dr. Macknight applied these passages to *the destruction of Jerusalem*, and the former without any distinction.

‡ See Kett on Prophecy, Vol. I. pages 230, 231.

Mr. Hardy's Note is as follows. "*Prodigiis mendacii.* i. e. Mendacibus "(ex Hebraismo) per qæ in errorem inducuntur homines. Vide Matt. xxiv. "24. *Terata Pseudous* sunt ea, quæ falsæ doctrinæ inserviunt; nam quod "vice genitivi est apud Hebræos, sæpe finem significat."

It

It is scarcely necessary to add, that he is here describing the very same delusions mentioned by the Apostle. Mr. Kett has also very well observed, that "these words (of our Lord) "clearly relate, not only to the prognostics, but to the cir- "cumstances which happened during the siege. 'The tyran- "nical zealots who ruled the city,' says Josephus, 'suborned "many false Prophets to declare, that aid would be given to "the people from heaven.' This was done to prevent them "from attempting to desert, and to inspire them with confi- "dence. In this manner Impostors, abusing the sacred "name of God, deluded the unhappy multitude; who, like "infatuated men who have neither eyes to see, nor reason "to judge, regarded neither the infallible denuntiations pro- "nounced by the antient Prophets, nor the clear prodigies "that indicated the approaching desolation." *

From this various and accumulated evidence; it might now safely be left to the judicious and candid Reader to determine, whether it is not, in the highest degree probable, that St. Paul had a reference in the whole of his description of *the Man of Sin*, &c.—not to *the corruptions of the Church of Rome*—but to *the Jewish nation*, and to *the destruction of Jerusalem*, and the accomplishment of our Lord's prediction upon that subject. But there is one argument more in favor of this interpretation which must not be omitted, as it will, perhaps, be deemed little inferior, in point of importance, to any which have been advanced, and that is contained in the 15th verse, and appears to be the conclusion of the subject. *Therefore brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word—or our Epistle.* Here *the standing fast* appears, most unquestionably, to be opposed, to their being *shaken in mind* or *troubled*, as particularly mentioned, in the second verse, and *the traditions* in which they were *to stand fast*, seem evidently to be those relating to *the coming of Christ*—or to the predictions of our Lord concerning *the true nature of his coming* as *the Messiah*—or *to the destruction of Jerusalem.* † Now, what is all this, but very

* See Kett on Prophecy, Vol. I. pages 230, 231.

† A very learned and ingenious Correspondent has very modestly put this Question upon the meaning of the word *tradition* here adopted. "May not "*the traditions* mentioned in 2 Thess ii. 15. be a general term, expressive "of the different doctrinal propositions which had been taught by St. "Paul?"

from the whole of the reasoning upon the Apostle's language, taken *collectively*, that the Reader will form his judgment of the propriety of applying it to *the Jewish nation*, and, it may, at least, be presumed, that enough has been said to stagger the staunchest advocate for the application of it to *the Church of Rome!*

But before this part of the subject is concluded, it may not be improper to remark, what a variety of interpretations have been indulged, by fanciful men, in explaining the meaning of this celebrated chapter. "These titles," says Mr. Zouch, when speaking of the Man of Sin, and Son of Perdition, &c. "have been given to different personages—to the leaders of "the factious Jews, who revolted from the Romans before "the destruction of Jerusalem—to Caius Caligula, a merciless tyrant—to the Emperor Titus, the delight of mankind—to Simon Magus—to the Gnostics—to Mahomet—nay, to the bright luminaries of the Reformation, John "Wickliff and Martin Luther. These different interpretations have had their allotted day. While the gloss of "novelty shines fresh upon them, they are in vogue, and "flourish for a time; but at length, like the dreams of a "sick man, they vanish into air." See Zouch's attempt, page 20.

The application of St. Paul's Man of Sin to *the Church of Rome*, has been the most generally adopted by Protestant Writers—but very learned men, *even among them*, appear by no means to have been satisfied of the justness of that interpretation. The late Mr. Jones; it is well known, adopted an hypothesis of his own, and has applied "the prophecy of "this great defection," to use the words of Mr. Zouch, in his Attempt, pages 3, 4, "to a neighbouring country, where "the Christian Religion hath been renounced, not negatively, "through corruption of manners, or neglect of truth, but "positively, publickly, and in solemn form; where the restraining power of government and the obligation of law "have not been interrupted and defied, but absolutely taken "out of the way and abolished—where we see a portentous "Company rise up, who take to themselves the sublime denomination of Legislators, not under the Authority of God, "but in their own right, exclusive of His Legislation, and "in opposition to His power; where the churches have been "shut up from the worship of God, and opened to admit the

" the worship of Reason—the reason of Man, or Man him-
" self, who now, as God, is actually seated in the Temple of
" God, to be worshipped." See Zouch's Attempt, page 4.

This hypothesis, Mr. Jones has so ingeniously supported, as, apparently, to have made a convert of Mr. Kett; for he says, * " That it has been satisfactorily shewn, by Mr. Jones, " that St. Paul's *Man of Sin*, is equally applicable to the " *Infidel power*, which we have seen arise in France." And what is still more extraordinary, Mr. Zouch, when speaking of Bishop Horsley's sentiments upon this subject, says, " It " excites some degree of surprise to find that your Lordship " doth not seem to acknowledge the traits and lineaments of Po-" pery in the Prophetic pages of Daniel, St. Paul, and St. " John. Whilst Mr. Kett, and almost all the Protestant " Interpreters of Scripture, intimate the decline and the ap-" proaching fall of Antichrist; you are fearful that his " kingdom is not yet begun, that *he is yet to rise*; or at least " that *he is only now rising*." †.

Had learned men been influenced by the evident interest that the Thessalonians had in the Apostle's description, and by the equally evident knowledge which they possessed of various particulars relative to it, they would have had little difficulty in finding out his meaning; for it appears with an evidence little short of demonstration, that the Apostle had *the Jewish nation*, and the Jewish nation *only*, in view, in his description of *the Man of Sin*, and that all other applications, however striking the resemblance may be, are totally groundless and ill founded, and, if depended on, will in the end, involve the abettors of them, in disappointment, and consequently, will have a tendency to injure, instead of serving the cause of Christianity. And this seems to be the case even with respect to the application of St. Paul's *Man of Sin* to the *Church of Rome*; for the advocates of this hypothesis are obliged to expect *the coming of Christ*, whenever its power is annihilated. That power, it is evident, is now upon the decline—but there is no room for supposing, from

* See Kett on Prophecy, Vol. I. page 381. See a Letter to the Bishop of Rochester by a Country Clergyman, page 7.

† It is remarkable that Mr. Kett quotes the Bishop of Rochester's sentiments upon this particular subject, with considerable marks of approbation. See Kett on Prophecy, Vol. II. pages 269, 270.

the present appearance of things, that any such event will soon take place. On the contrary—many prophecies are yet to be accomplished. The Jewish nation is yet to be converted, and both Jew and Gentile are to be *one fold under one Shepherd, Jesus Christ*, and a more general and universal influence of his Religion, to be effected than has hitherto been experienced. It behoves the friend of Christianity therefore to be extremely cautious and guarded against forming expectations which may never be realized, lest his disappointment should have, an unfriendly influence, upon his own mind, as well as upon the minds of others.

The same observations will apply to the term *Antichrist* which has, generally, been supposed to be synonymous with *the Man of Sin*, and has been, as generally, applied to *the Church of Rome*. It will therefore be necessary to enquire what is the meaning of the term *Antichrist*, and whether it is justly applicable to that Church, according to the use of it, in the sacred Writings: for, if it was used to signify the Bishop of Rome; it will be, an insuperable bar, to the interpretation which has here been adopted concerning *the Man of Sin*; for they both have, as will presently be seen, an evident reference to the same subject.

The term *Antichrist* is made use of, no where, in the sacred Writings, but in the two first Epistles of St. John, and no language can be stronger than that which is used, in these Epistles—not only to express *his near approach*—but *his actual existence*. 1 John ii. 18. *Little children it is* THE LAST TIME; *and as ye have heard that* ANTICHRIST *shall come—even now there are many* ANTICHRISTS, *whereby we know that it is the last time*. It is the more necessary to examine into this matter, because it has been thought, from these and similar expressions, in the Epistles, that the Apostle asserted the near approach of *the end of the World*.

There is some difference of opinion respecting *the time* when this Epistle was written, some supposing that it was written, a short time BEFORE *the destruction of Jerusalem*, and others, that it was not written till some years afterwards. And, if the latter was the case; it will be very difficult to understand what the Apostle could mean by the term *Antichrist*, —particularly as connected with his assertion that it was *the last time*, and that there were *many Antichrists, whereby they knew it was the last time*.

Dr.

Dr. Lardner has mentioned Mill, Le Clerc, Basnage, Baronius, Beausobre, and L'Enfant, Dupin, Mr. Whiston, and Mr. Lampe, as being of the opinion that it was composed after *the destruction of Jerusalem*, and he himself, after examining the internal evidence of the time when it was written, is inclined to place it about the year Eighty. On the other hand, he very candidly mentions Grotius, Hammond, Whitby, and Dr. Benson, as being of opinion, that it was wrote before that great calamity befel the Jewish nation; and he mentions the latter of these Writers as inclined to place it in the year of our Lord Sixty-eight—of Nero Fourteen—that is, after the Jewish war broke out, and not long before the destruction of Jerusalem. * It may be added also that Mr. Pyle, Bishop Hurd, Dr. Macknight, and the very respectable Archbishop Newcome, were of the opinion that it was composed *before* that event took place. And they appear to have formed this opinion from the *internal evidence* contained in the Epistle; which in this case is the best evidence which can be obtained.

Thus Mr. Pyle, in his preface to the first Epistle of St. John, says—"His mentioning *the last hour*; (i. e. Chris-"tianity abolishing the Jewish dispensation, along with the "Antichrists and false Prophets that our Saviour foretold "would be the forerunners of the destruction of that nation), "seem most strongly to intimate the time of writing this "Epistle to have been *before* the destruction of Jerusalem, "and it is therefore, I think, with the most probability "placed by Dr. Whitby in or about the year Sixty-seven "or Sixty-eight,"

Dr. Benson, in his Note on the expression—*From whence we know that it is the last hour*, says, "The strength of the "argument is here—Our Saviour had prophesied, that just "before the destruction of Jerusalem, Antichrist would "appear. A number of Antichrists had accordingly ap-"peared. From hence they might conclude that it was *the* "*last hour*, or that the desolation of the Jewish Temple, "City, and Nation, was just at hand." And, in his preceding Note, he says, "St. John's putting them in mind, "that they *had heard* of these things, was, in effect, saying,

* See Lardner's History of the Apostles, Vol. III. pages 266, 267.

" TAKE HEED, and beware, by attending to the admonitions, " which have been given you." (See 2 John ver. 7, 8.)

Bishop Hurd says, " The time that elapsed from Christ's " ascension to the destruction of Jerusalem, is called the " *latter times*; and the eve of its destruction, is called the " *last hour*." See Vol. II. page 7. And again he says, " That the appearance of false Christs and false Prophets, (of " which there were many, according to our Lord's prediction, " in St. John's time), indicated the arrival of that hour, that " was to be fatal to the Jewish state." Ibid. page 9.

Dr. Macknight's Paraphrase is as follows. " Be not ter- " rified by the rage of the unbelieving Jews; *It is the last* " *hour* of the Jewish Commonwealth. And as ye have " heard that the Antichrist, who denieth the appearing of " Christ in the flesh, chap. iv. 3. cometh before the de- " struction of Jerusalem, so now there are many such Anti- " christs; *from which we know that it is the last hour of the* " *Jewish state.*"

Archbishop Newcome has observed, " that Grotius's Note " upon 1 John ii. 18. is well worth considering. *Ultima* " *hora*, i. e. ultimum tempus, ubi ad Judæos sermo est " significat tempus proximum excidio urbis ac templi & rei- " publicæ Judæorum." The Archbishop, with great pro- priety, adds, " And the words, *whereby we know that it is the* " *last time*, have much force, if we suppose that they refer " to our Lord's Prophecies," viz. of the destruction of Jerusalem. See Archbishop Newcome's Observations, page 192.

Bishop Prettyman likewise, when speaking of the date of this Epistle, says, " Some have supposed that it was written " *before*, and others *after*, the destruction of Jerusalem. In " the following passage, *It is the last time; and as we have* " *heard that Antichrist shall come, even now are there many* " *Antichrists, whereby we know that it is the last time*, the " Apostle seems to allude to the approaching dissolution of " the Jewish state, and to Christ's predictions concerning " the false Teachers who were to appear before the destruction " of Jerusalem." See Bishop Prettyman's Elements of Christian Theology, Vol. I. page 486.

The observation which was formerly made, when consider- ing the meaning of the vth chapter of the first Epistle to the Thessalonians, will have equal force here, viz. that if St. John's

John's language had a reference to that of our Lord, in the xxivth of Matthew and the parallel chapters, Commentators were bound, by all the rules of sound reasoning, to adhere to the obvious meaning of our Lord, which most unquestionably was, to guard men against those who should assume the character of the Messiah—or who should oppose his just claims to that character. And this sense, the Writers just quoted, the judicious and attemtive Reader will observe, they have very sufficiently and fully expressed in those passages.

But, most unfortunately another meaning of the word *Antichrist*, which is totally unconnected with our Lord's predictions, and most certainly was never meant by St. John, when he made use of the term *Antichrist*, has been introduced, and Bishop Hurd, in particular, though he has, in express terms, admitted that "the appearance of *false Christs and* "*false Prophets*, indicated the arrival of that *hour* that was "to be fatal to the Jewish state," and that "the time that "elapsed from Christ's Ascension to *the destruction of Jeru-* "*salem*, is called the *latter times*, and the eve of its destruc- "tion, is called *the last hour*;" yet he says, "we are to "apply them, in the same manner, to the *reign of Antichrist* "—to *the Millenium*—to *the day of Judgment*." But, upon what authority is this application made? Not, surely, upon that of St. John; for the learned Prelate has expressly referred his language to our Lord's prediction concerning *the dsstruction of Jerusalem*. But he says, "The appearance of "false Christs and false Prophets were, at the same time, the "*types and forerunners* of a still more dreadful power, which "should be revealed in *the latter times*, in a future period, "when that calamity was past." * For the truth of the assertion, that such a power should arise in the Christian church, he appeals to "*a tradition*, then current among the Disciples; and "his hated name of *Antichrist* is here applied, by way of anti- "cipation, to the false Prophets of that time; as possessing "much of his character, and acting with his spirit."

Here the judicious and attentive Reader will observe, that the whole foundation of the doctrine of *Antichrist* is built upon the assertion, "That the appearance of *false Christs* "*and false Prophets*, were at the same time, the types and

* Upon the subject of Types—See a remarkable passage quoted from Richards's Bampton Lectures, page 122. of this Work.

"forerunners

" forerunners of a still more dreadful power which should be " fully revealed in the *latter times*, in a future period, when " that calamity was past." But has St. John said any such thing? Has he not, on the contrary, confined the appearance of *false Christs and false Prophets*, to *the last hour* that was to be fatal to the Jewish state, and that they knew by their appearance that it was *the last hour?* " But," says the Bishop, " for the truth of the assertion, that such a power should " arise in the Christian church, he appeals to *a tradition*, " then current among the Disciples." But where is this appeal made? The Apostle does indeed say—*Ye have heard that Antichrist shall come*—but this Antichrist was *the false Christs and false Prophets that were now already in the world*—*whereby they knew that it was* THE LAST TIME. The tradition then current among the Disciples was—not that such a power should arise in the Christian church, in a future period, when that calamity was past—but that *Antichrist*—or, as St. John himself explains the term, *the false Christs and false Prophets* appearing, would indicate the arrival of that hour that was to be fatal to the Jewish state.* The assertion therefore that, " his hated name of *Antichrist* is here applied, " by way of anticipation, to the false Prophets of that time; " and as possessing much of his character, and acting with " his spirit," is totally without foundation.

That this is not a misrepresentation of the Apostle's meaning, will appear from an attentive examination of the Epistle itself, in which the Reader will not find, even the shadow of a proof, that the appearance of *false Christs and false Prophets* were " the types and fore-runners of a still more dread- " ful power." And it is remarkable enough that Dr. Benson has, in the most express terms, acknowledged that the Apostle in this place, in using the word *Antichrist*, had not a reference to the Church of Rome. " I am," says he, " well " persuaded that *the Church of Rome* and the *Pope*, as the " head thereof, is an enemy to Christ; and as such prophesied " of, 2 Thess. ii. 1, &c. where he is described as *the Man of* " *Sin; and he, whose coming is after the working of Satan.*

* Mr. Hardy's idea of *this tradition* appears to be perfectly accurate; for in his Note, he says—" *Sicut audivistis*, ab ipso Christo, Matt. xxiv. 24. " et ab Apostolis, ut Joh. v. 43." In his subsequent Note on *Unde scimus*, &c. he says—" i. e. Certi sumus exitium gentis Judaicæ jam instare, ex- " prædictione illa, Matt. xxiv. 5."

" And

" And, by this Apostle, Rev. chap. xvii. in characters no
" lesse evident. Though I cannot find, that in *Scripture*, he
" is, any where, expressly called, by the name of *Antichrist*,
" and in this place, (chap. ii. 22.) St. John does not seem
" to have been prophesying of that corrupt Church; but
" describing the false Teachers, who were then sprung up,
" in the Church." See Benson on 1 John, ii. 22.

Dr. Macknight's Note on 1 John ii. 18. is as follows—
" The word *Antichrist* is no where found but in John's
" First and Second Epistles. It may have two meanings.
" For, if the preposition in (the word) *Antichrist*, denotes,
" *in place of*, the name will signify one who puts himself
" in the place of Christ; consequently *Antichrist* is a *false*
" *Christ*. But if the preposition denotes *opposition*, *Anti-*
" *christ* is one who opposeth Christ.—The persons to whom
" this Epistle was written, had heard of *the coming* of *Anti-*
" *christ*, in both senses of the name. For the first sort of
" Antichrists were foretold by our Lord, Matt. xxiv. 5.
" *Many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ, and*
" *shall deceive many*. The second sort were foretold Matt.
" xxiv. 11. *Many false Prophets will arise, and deceive*
" *many*. * From what John hath written, ver. 22. of this
" chapter, and chap. iv. 3. and 2d Epist. ver. 7. I am in-
" clined to think that by *Antichrist*, he means those false
" Prophets, or Teachers, who were foretold by our Lord to
" arise about the time of the destruction of Jerusalem, and
" who were now gone abroad; some of these denied the hu-
" manity of Jesus Christ, others of them denied his divinity;
" and as both sorts opposed Christ, by denying the redemp-
" tion of the world through his death, I suppose it is of
" them chiefly that John speaks in his Epistles.—When the
" Apostle mentions these false Teachers collectively, he calls
" them *the Antichrist* in the singular number, as St. Paul
" called the false Teachers collectively, of whom he prophe-
" sied, 2 Thess. ii. 3. *The Man of Sin*. But when John
" speaks of these Teachers as individuals, he calls them *many*
" *Antichrists*, in the plural number."

Let it not here be supposed, that it is meant to deny that *the Church of Rome* has discovered an *Antichristian Spirit*—

* The judicious Reader will observe that both sorts have a direct and exclusive relation to *the destruction of Jerusalem*.

much

much less to assert, that *the corruptions* of that church are no where predicted in the New Testament. The only thing here contended for is, that the Apostle used the word *Antichrist* of those *exclusively* who had been predicted, as appearing prior to *the destruction of Jerusalem*, and that Bishop Hurd, by introducing a typical meaning of the word *Antichrist* has deviated *entirely* from the meaning of the Apostle. *

* Bishop Hurd has borne very hard upon the reputation of Grotius, for having endeavoured to prove that the Pope was not *Antichrist*. "The "character of Hugo Grotius," says the Bishop, "is well known. He *is* "justly esteemed among the ablest and most learned men of an age that "abounded in ability and learning. Besides his other shining talents, his "acquaintance with history was extensive; and his knowledge of Scripture, "profound And yet, with two such requisites for unlocking the true "sense of the prophetic writings, this excellent man undertook to prove "in form, *that the Pope was not Antichrist*.

"The account of this mischance is as extraordinary, as the mischance "itself. The moral qualities of Grotius were still more admirable, than "his intellectual: and in these qualities, we shall find the true spring of his "unhappy and misapplied pains on the subject before us.

"He was in his own nature just, candid, benevolent, to a supreme "degree; and the experience of an active turbulent life, had but fortified "him the more in a love of these pacific virtues. He was, on principle, "a sincere and zealous Christian; and consequently, impressed with a due "sense of that exalted charity, which is the characteristic of that religion: "but he had seen and felt much of the mischiefs, which proceed from "theological quarrels: and thus every thing concurred to make him a friend "to peace, and, above all, to peace among Christians.

"An union of the Catholic and Protestant churches seemed necessary to "this end; and the apparent candour, whether real or affected, of some learned "persons, whom he had long known and valued in the church of Rome, "drew him into the belief, that such a project was not impracticable. "Henceforth, it became the ruling object of his life; and permitting him-"self too easily to conclude, that the Protestant doctrine of Antichrist was "the sole, or principal obstruction to the union desired, he bent all the "efforts of his wit and learning to discredit and overthrow that doctrine.

"Thus was this virtuous man betrayed by the wisdom and equity of his "own character; and I know not if the observation of the moral Poet can "be so justly applied to any other---

"Insani sapiens nomen ferat, æquus iniqui,
"Ultrà quàm satis est, virtutem si petat ipsam." Hor. I. Ep. vi. 15.

See Bishop Hurd on the Prophecies, Vol. II. pages 61---64. 5th Edition.

This is a most curious account of the origin of Grotius's attempt to prove that *the Pope was not Antichrist*; upon which it is only necessary to make one single remark, viz. that Bishop Hurd would deservedly think himself very ill treated, if his endeavours to prove that *the Pope was Antichrist*, were to be ascribed to any other motive, than to a conviction of the truth of that doctrine!

Besides

Besides the evidence which has already been adduced, that the Apostles language, when speaking of *the Antichrists*, in chap. ii. 18. had a reference to the great controversy between the Jews and our Lord, concerning *the character of the Messiah*—may be added, what he has said in the subsequent part of the chapter. Thus, ver. 22, he says—*Who is a liar if not he who denieth that Jesus is* THE CHRIST—or *the Messiah. He is* ANTICHRIST who denieth the Father and the Son. And this the Apostle explains in the following verse—*Whosoever denieth the Son—the same hath not the Father.* And, in the 26th verse, he expressly declares, what was the principal cause of his writing to them upon this subject. *These things have I written to you, concerning them that seduce you*, i. e. who endeavour to persuade you that Jesus is not *the Messiah*, and that he is *yet to come.*

In the ivth chapter, the Apostle returns again to the same subject, and expresseth himself, in such a particular and unequivocal manner, as to render it impossible for any one who attends to the Gospel, as *an history* of the great controversy concerning *the true nature of the Messiah's character*, to misunderstand him. V. 1. *Beloved, believe not every Spirit —but try the Spirits whether they are of God.* And the reason which he gives for this trial of the Spirits is, that *many* FALSE PROPHETS *were gone out into the world*, as he had before asserted in ch. ii. 18. But how was this trial to be made? Why, says the Apostle, v. 2. *Hereby know ye the Spirit of God* —or rather, as the argument seems to require, *the Spirit which is of God. Every Spirit*—or every person, *who confesseth that Jesus Christ*—or the Messiah, *is come in the flesh, is of God. And every Spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ*—or the Messiah, *is come in the flesh is not of God.* This the judicious Reader will observe, is equivalent to what the Apostle had said, chap. ii. 23. *Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father.* The Apostle then adds, in the closest connection with these declarations—that they had a rule by which they were to be guided, in the trial of the Spirits. V. 3. *And this is that Spirit of* ANTICHRIST, *whereof ye have heard that it should come, and even now already is in the world*, agreeable to his former declaration, chap. ii. 18. *that they had heard that* ANTICHRIST *should come, and that even now there were many* ANTICHRISTS, *whereby they knew that it was the last time.* Is it possible not to perceive that

 the

the whole of this language has an immediate and direct reference to the controversy concerning *the nature of the Messiah's character*, and particularly to our Lord's prediction of *the coming of false Christs and false Prophets, who would, if possible, deceive the very Elect*, and induce them to follow those who should assume his character!

In addition to this argument, the Apostle adds another, which has so evident an allusion to the controversy concerning *the nature of the Messiah's character*, that it is, if attentively considered, scarcely to be resisted. V. 4, 5. *Ye are of God little children and have overcome them*, viz. *the false Prophets*—you have seen through and got the better of their artifices—*because greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world. They are of the world and the world heareth them.* The Messiah which they looked for, was *a temporal Prince*, who was to raise them to a distinguished pre-eminence in *the world*, and they who *spoke of the world*, were listened to with extreme avidity. *They savored not*, as our Lord had formerly told his Disciples, THE THINGS OF GOD but THE THINGS OF MEN.

It should seem, likewise, that St. John had a particular reference to the prevalence of *this worldly disposition*, when he says, chap. ii. 15. *Love not* THE WORLD, *neither the things of* THE WORLD. *If any man love* THE WORLD, *the love of the Father is not in him; for all that is in* THE WORLD—*the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of* THE WORLD. *And* THE WORLD *passeth away, and the lust thereof—but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.* It seems the more probable, that the Apostle had *this worldly disposition* particularly in view, as it respected *the nature of the coming of the Messiah*, as it is in this connection that he speaks of its being *the last time*, and that there were MANY ANTICHRISTS, *whereby they knew that it was* THE LAST TIME.

Dr. Lardner has indeed said, that "the phrase *the world* "*passeth away and the lust thereof*, are only general expres- "sions, representing the uncertainty of all earthly things, and "therefore afford no any argument that the Apostle had "therein a regard to affairs in Judea. For if he had, his "expressions would have been more distinct and particular." See Lardner's History of the Apostles, Vol. III. pages 270, 271. But this does not appear to be said with his usual judgment;

judgment; for it was surely not necessary to be more particular than to connect this language with *the coming of false Christs and false Prophets.* It is however still more remarkable, that in his observations concerning *the time when* St. John wrote this Epistle, he appears not to have taken the smallest notice of his language with respect to *the coming of Antichrist,* having a reference to that of our Lord, though St. John has again and again particularly spoken of them.

With respect to the second Epistle; it seems only necessary to observe that the Apostle, by making use of the same language which he had adopted, in his former Epistle, evidently refers to that of our Lord, in the xxivth of Matthew and the parallel chapters, and that, in fact, by this reference; it is not only in the most pointed and decided manner, ascertained that they were both written BEFORE *the destruction of Jerusalem*—but that by the term *Antichrist,* he only meant to describe *the false Christs and false Prophets,* who, according to our Saviour's prediction, were to precede that event.

Many other very important and interesting observations might be made, upon these Epistles, and particularly upon the former—but as they would have no particular relation to the great design of this work, they must be omitted; observing only, that in the beginning of his first Epistle, he tells those to whom he wrote, that the subject matter of his letter, had a relation to what they were personal witnesses of —to what they had *seen and heard,* i. e. to what they had been *eye and ear witnesses of.* Chap. i. 1, 2, 3. *That which was from the beginning—which we have heard—which we have seen with our eyes—which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled of the word of life; (for the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us)*—*That,* I say, *which we have seen and heard, declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: And truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. And these things we write unto you that your joy*—arising from the evidence of the facts of which we have been the eye and ear witnesses, and particularly of that important fact, that Jesus *the Messiah* is come in the flesh—*may be full!*

If from the two Epistles of St. John, the Reader will turn his attention to the Epistle to the Hebrews, he will find the

Writer of it alluding to the near approach of some awful and tremendous calamity. In the xth chapter, particularly, he tells those to whom he wrote, that *they saw the day approaching*—that *vengeance belonged unto God*—that *the Lord would judge his people*—and that *yet a little while, and he that should come would come, and would not tarry.*

That these expressions are capable of being applied to *temporal calamities* scarcely needs any proof, and that they were intended to point out *the approaching destruction of Jerusalem* will be rendered, in the highest degree probable, by attending to the drift of the argument which the Writer makes use of, in that chapter.

The learned Dr. Lardner has quoted many authorities to prove that this Epistle was written to *Jewish Christians*, and the whole turn of thought throughout the Epistle, appears to render it unquestionable that this was *the fact.* The attachment of the Jews to the Mosaic institution being of the strongest kind; it was of the utmost importance to satisfy those of that persuasion, that had embraced Chritianity, that the great purposes of that institution were fully answered, in the person of Jesus Christ, and more particularly as it respected *the doctrine of atonement for sin.* Under that institution, numerous sacrifices and offerings were appointed; the principal purpose of which was to inspire a confidence in the offerer, in the Divine forgiveness of the sins which he had committed, and to direct his attention to a better and more perfect state of things, when these sacrifices would be no longer necessary —being fully answered by the sacrifice of him, of whom the sacrifices under the law, were typical. This appears, most unquestionably, to have been the Writer's design in the 10th chapter, when he says v. 1, that *the law was* but *a shadow of good things to come*—that *the sacrifices which were offered*, from time to time, *could never make the comers thereunto perfect*, and that every Priest under the Mosaic dispensation ministered and offered the same sacrifices—but that Jesus Christ, *after he had offered* ONE SACRIFICE *for sins, for ever sat down on the right hand of God; from henceforth expecting*—or waiting, *till his enemies should be made his footstool; for by one offering*, says this Writer, *he hath perfected for ever, them that are sanctified.*

Having, in this manner, asserted the superior excellence and permanent efficacy of the sacrifice which Jesus had offered

offered, rendering all other sacrifices useless and unnecessary —the Writer, with great propriety, refers to a Prophecy of this more perfect state of things. V. 15. *Moreover also the Holy Ghost beareth witness to us*, i. e. * says Mr. Pearce of of Exon, confirms what I have said. *This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days—I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more. Now*, says the Author of this Epistle—*Where there is a remission of these*, i. e. such a remission of these sins, as that they shall, by the conditions of the covenant, be remembered no more—there can be occasion for *no more*, or farther, *offering for sin. Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest, by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way*, &c.—*let us hold fast the profession of our faith, without wavering—for he is faithful that promised, and let us consider one another, to provoke unto love and to good works: not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together as the manner of some is, but exhorting one another: and so much the more* is this necessary *as ye see the day approaching.*

What the Author of this Epistle meant by *the day approaching* seems evident from the following verses, in which he particularly cautions those to whom he wrote, against apostasy from the Christian faith, that they might avoid the judgment which was about to devour † the adversaries—or those who were its opponents. And to shew, in the clearest manner, what that judgment and fiery indignation was, he states what was the fate of those who despised the law of Moses, which unquestionably was, the infliction of *temporal punishment*, and from thence argues, that those who trod under foot the Son of God, &c. would be justly exposed to a still *severer punishment*; for says the Author of this Epistle—v. 30. *We know him that hath said vengeance is mine—I will recompence saith the Lord.* And to render his argument for their being steadfast in the profession of their faith, and the severe punishment which awaited Apostasy, the more im-

* " *Testificatur* (sub. hoc) *nobis*. i. e. Adsentitur nobis, et sententiam à " nobis hic explicatam testimonio suo comprobat; nempè, *Christum una* " *oblatione sui perfectum redemptionis pretium dedisse.*" Hardy in loc.

† The original word perfectly harmonizes with what the Apostle had before said, that they *saw the day approaching*.

pressive

pressive, he adds, verse 31. *It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.*

There appears to have been a considerable delicacy in the Apostle's referring to the punishment which was approaching, by examples taken from the Old Testament, rather than by particularly mentioning *the destruction of Jerusalem* by name—but that he does refer to it, there seems to be no room to doubt; especially as in the following verses, he encourages them to perseverance in the extraordinary firmness which they had hitherto displayed, by the consideration that they should have *a great recompence of reward;* for, says he, ye have need of patience—that after ye have done—or performed the will of God, *ye might receive the promise; for yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry.*

It will readily occur to the judicious and attentive Reader, that when our Lord foretold *the destruction of Jerusalem*, he in a particular manner, connected with that prediction, *a promise of deliverance* from the more dreadful effects of that awful calamity. And, if there is reason for supposing that the Author of this Epistle is here alluding to *the near approach of that awful calamity*, it can hardly be imagined that he should omit so important an argument to encourage them to perseverance. *The recompence of the reward*, therefore, and *the promise* they were to receive, especially when connected with the assertion that it was yet but *a little while, and he that should come would come, and would not tarry*, can hardly be understood in any other sense, than of deliverance from the approaching calamity of *the destruction of Jerusalem.*

That *the destruction of Jerusalem* was what the Apostle meant, when he asserted that they *saw the day approaching*, will be rendered still more evident from what the Author of the Epistle has said in the 12th chapter; for it is worthy of particular notice, that he here renews the same cautions against Apostasy, and makes use of the same or similar arguments, as he had used in the chapter which has just been examined. V. 25. *See that ye refuse not him that speaketh; for if they escaped not, who refused him that spake on earth—much rather shall not we* escape, *if we turn away from him who speaketh*—or who is *from heaven.*

It seems not to be essential to the design of this work, to enter into a critical and minute examination—who is here meant by him that *spoke on earth;* it being sufficient to the force

force of the argument to understand, that by *him who speaketh from heaven* is meant, *Jesus the Mediator of the New Covenant*, or which amounts to the same thing—God the Father speaking by him. In the one case there was *a shaking of the earth*. In the other, the Author of the Epistle says—*But now he hath promised, saying—Yet once more, I shake not the earth only, but also heaven. And this word* ONCE MORE, *signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken, may remain.*

The judicious Reader will recollect that when our Lord predicted *the destruction of Jerusalem*, his language concerning that event was, that *the powers of the heavens should be shaken*, and in a former part of this work, to which the Reader is referred, it was shewn that this was the language of antient prophecy to denote any remarkable *temporal calamities*. This being unquestionable; it may fairly be concluded, to use the words of Mr. Pearce of Exon, in his Note on Heb. xii. 26. that "the sense in which our Author explains this promise is "manifestly this, that God would shake, dissolve, and put "an end, to earthly and heavenly authorities, or kingdoms, "and set up himself a kingdom, under the Messiah, that "should (ultimately) prevail against all others, and should "not be abolished, but continue to the end of the world." And he observes that, "He shows this to be the sense of the "place, when he immediately adds, according to our trans-"lation—*And this word*—YET ONCE MORE, signifieth the "removing of those things that are shaken, as of those "things that are made, that those things which cannot be "shaken may remain. Now what those things are, *which "cannot be shaken*, he shows plainly, in the next words, "*wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved.* "And what kingdom can that be, which Christians receive, "but *the kingdom of the Messiah?* And if this kingdom "that *cannot be shaken*, is set up upon the shaking of the things "that are made, that is *the heavens and the earth*—must not *the "heavens and the earth* signify some kingdoms that are re-"moved or put down?" See Pierce in loc.

Mr Pierce's learned Continuator, Mr. Hallett, thus paraphrases the promise contained in these words, *Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven.* "When God "uses this expression, *yet once more*, he signifies thereby,

"the

" the change that should *once*, and but once, be made of
" those things that are shaken, as of things that had formerly
" been appointed, that so the things which are not shaken
" may remain unchanged. Wherefore as we Christians do
" now receive the Gospel Kingdom, which we know shall
" be unshaken and immoveable, let us be steadfast in em-
" bracing and adhering to the grace of God manifested in
" the Gospel, by the help of which we may serve God ac-
" ceptably, with a holy reverence and fear of him; which
" dispositions of soul in God's service are highly necessary
" for us, because our God, even under this dispensation of
" grace, is a consuming fire to such as reject and despise
" him." See Mr. Hallet in loc. *

If these Writers have given the true sense of the language of the Writer to the Hebrews—the judicious and attentive Reader cannot fail to admire how exactly it harmonizes with our Lord's *original language*, that *the kingdom of heaven*, or of the Messiah, *was at hand*, and how cautious and guarded he appears to have been, in mentioning *the destruction of Jerusalem* by name, by speaking of it only in general terms, and in the language of antient prophecy. Such a conduct was not only dictated by the injunction of our Lord, *to be wise as Serpents and harmless as Doves*, but by the maxims of *common prudence*, as the mentioning the approaching calamity expressly by name, could only have tended to irritate and inflame those who were but too much irritated already. And as the use of the language of prophecy was, from the peculiar circumstances of the times, perfectly intelligible to those to whom it was addressed; it was fully sufficient to answer every purpose which he had in view. To modern Readers, it may have the appearance of being obscure, and sometimes, perhaps, unintelligible—but it could not have been so to them; especially, if it be considered that the language of Prophecy was to them, *as Jews*, perfectly familiar!

If the explanation which has now been given of the xth and xiith chapters of the Epistle to the Hebrews shall, upon examination, be found to be accurate and satisfactory—all suspicion will be completely done away, of the Writer of that Epistle having predicted the *near approach of the final Judge-*

* It seems probable that when it is said *God is a consuming fire*, he alludes to the awful destruction of *the Jewish nation*.

ment

ment of the world. But as St. Peter, in his Two Epistles, has come in for his share of the charge of having taught such a doctrine; it will be necessary to enter upon a critical examination of those Epistles. This will be the more necessary as there appear to be some things in those Epistles which have exceedingly perplexed Commentators of all descriptions, accurately to understand.

It has generally been agreed, that the First Epistle of Peter was addressed to Christian converts from among the Gentiles, and indeed this is so evident from what is said in different parts of the Epistle, and particularly of the two first chapters, that it may be said to be unquestionable. Thus they are stiled ELECT, *according to the foreknowledge of God.* They are exhorted not *to fashion themselves according to their former lusts in their ignorance,* i. e. in the state of heathen darkness, in which they were involved prior to their conversion to Christianity. So again it is said—*the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries.* And still more decisively—that FORMERLY *they were not a people, but were* NOW *the people of God,* and that they had *not obtained mercy,* but that *now they had obtained mercy.*

It was extremely natural for the Apostle, when writing to persons of this description, to remind them of *the inestimable value* of the blessing which had thus been bestowed upon them. This he does, in very strong terms, in the third and following verses, *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, according to his abundant mercy, hath begotten us to a lively hope*—or to an hope of life, *by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead—to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven*—or in the heavens, *for you who are kept by the power of God to the Salvation which is ready to be revealed in the last time.* In the following verse, he tells them that it was *in this Salvation* that they *greatly rejoiced, though now,* says he, *for a season, if need be*—or seeing from the circumstances of the times that it is necessary, *ye are in heaviness, through manifold temptations, that the trial of your faith* in this Salvation, *might be found unto praise, and honor and glory, at the appearing*—or rather as it should have been

translated, (for the word is the same in the original as in the fifth verse), at *the revelation of Jesus Christ.*

Most Commentators appear to have been of opinion that *the Salvation ready to be revealed in the last time*, in the fifth verse, and *the revelation of Jesus Christ*, at the close of the seventh verse, relate to the final and everlasting Salvation of mankind, in *a future state*, and no doubt this is included in it, and is the final object of *the Gospel dispensation*;—but it is submitted to the judicious Reader's attentive consideration, whether the course of the Apostle's argument does not require it to be understood of *the Salvation* to which the Gentiles, as *a Nation*, were to be introduced at the full revelation, by the destruction of the Jewish Nation, of the extensive designs which Jesus, as *the Messiah*, had in view, with respect to *the Gentile world*. This sense seems strongly confirmed, by what the Apostle says in the 10th verse, *Of which Salvation*, to wit, of the Gentiles—the Prophets have enquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace—or favor that should come—or which should be bestowed *upon you*: * searching what—or what manner of time the spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified before-hand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that *should follow* those sufferings. *Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things which are now reported by them that have preached the Gospel unto you, with the holy Ghost sent down from heaven: Which things the Angels desire to look into.*

This last expression cannot fail to carry back the Reader's recollection to the history of this Apostle, whose reluctance to believe that the Gentiles were to be taken into the divine favor, is so strikingly displayed upon Cornelius's sending for him. Such language coming from him was peculiarly characteristic, and forms a striking proof, in addition to those already mentioned, what the Apostle meant by *the Salvation ready to be revealed*.

But it must not be omitted to be observed, that the expression *the Salvation ready to be revealed*, appears to have a

* "*Qui prophetaverunt de gratia in vos.* sub venturâ. i. e. De adventu "Messiæ et beneficiis evangelii sub umbris. See Hardy in loc." Again he says—"Præsignificabant prophetæ *Christum passurum multa*, Luke xxiv. "25, 26. sed alii obscurius, alii clarius.

peculiar

peculiar propriety in it, if it be compared with Luke xvii. 20, 28, 30. for it was in answer to the question of the Disciples—*When the kingdom of God*—or of the Messiah, *should come*, that our Lord said—*As it was in the days of Lot—even thus shall it be* when the true nature of the coming *of the Son of Man is revealed*, i. e. when it will appear that the great object of his mission was—not as the Jews fondly imagined, exclusively to benefit them, by raising them to universal empire, but to include within his benevolent views—the Gentile world—or the whole of the human race.

The Apostle having thus, in the most plain and unequivocal terms, asserted that *the call of the Gentiles* was particularly foreseen and foretold by the antient Prophets, founds upon it the following very pertinent and interesting exhortation, ver. 13. *Wherefore, gird up the loins of your minds—be sober, and hope to the end*—entertain a firm expectation of the grace—or favor which is to be brought to you, as Gentiles, at the Revelation of Jesus Christ.

Here the judicious Reader will scarcely need to be reminded, that *the end* so often mentioned in the xxivth of Matthew, and the parallel chapters, was *the destruction of Jerusalem*, for which they were particularly directed *to watch*, as *the final* and crowning evidence that the Jews had totally mistaken the true nature of the Messiah's character, for, by that event, the middle wall of partition between Jew and Gentile would be completely removed, and so AN ENTRANCE *would be administered unto them* ABUNDANTLY, *into the everlasting kingdom* of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

This interpretation is so clear, and affords so decided a refutation of the opinion that St. Peter spoke of, *the end of the world* as *at hand*, and gives so natural and easy an explanation of the phrase *the revelation of Jesus Christ*, that it will be deemed, by all good Judges of evidence, to be entirely satisfactory, even though it should, upon examination, be found to be impossible to remove the obscurity which appears to hang over some of the subsequent parts of this Epistle.

The Apostle having congratu[illegible] *the Gentile Converts* upon the[illegible]n to the disting[illegible]rivileges and blessings [illegible] pensation, [illegible]at election was the [illegible]ophecy—[illegible]t, throughout the [illegible]ve been [illegible]n to behave themselves

selves in a manner suitable to their new and exalted character *as Christians.* This he doth, first in general Terms, in chap. i. 14, 15. *As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your* state *of ignorance—but as he who hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation.* He afterwards, in the second chapter, descends to particulars, and instances the particular duties of obedience to Government, as they were members of society at large; and the more private and domestic duties—as masters and servants—husbands and wives; and he tells them in the third chapter, that their good and upright conduct in these several relations would, generally speaking, have the most friendly influence upon the happiness of their lives. Chap. iii. 10. *He that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile. Let him eschew evil and do good—let him seek peace and pursue it*—or endeavour, by all honourable means, to obtain it. Such a conduct, says the Apostle, would, generally speaking, secure the love and good-will of mankind, —ver. 13. *And, who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good? But if,* says he, it should so happen, through the wickedness of men—*even if you suffer for righteousness sake, happy are ye, for it is better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well doing, than for evil doing.* He then, in this connection, instances *the example of Christ,* ver. 18. *For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the* power of the *spirit.* * In the beginning of the following chapter he carries

* The verses which follow to the end of the chapter have much perplexed Commentators to understand, and no part of the New Testament has been considered as more difficult and obscure. But whatever be the meaning of the whole of them; it appears that our Translators have stumbled, in the very threshold, by rendering the word *Phulake* a *Prison*; for though it unquestionably has that signification; yet the primary sense of it is, not *a Prison* but *preservation,* and from hence it very naturally was made use of, to signify *a place for preservation;* whether a Prison, a Garrison, or any other place of security.

That the Greek word should have been translated *preservation* can not admit of a doubt; for the object of *the preaching of Noah* most indisputably was, *the preservation of the disobedient.* It is equally evident, that *the long suffering of God,* mentioned in the subsequent part of the verse, was exercised for the same benevolent purpose, and no one can possibly doubt that

ries on the thread of his reasoning thus, ver. 1. *Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh—Arm yourselves with the same mind*—with the same heroic fortitude, to suffer as just men, as he did—*for he that hath suffered in the flesh* for the sake of a good conscience, hath by that act declared his resolution to *cease*—or to desist—*from sin*, * i. e. to suffer for *well doing rather than for evil doing, that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh, to the lusts of men, but to the will of God; for the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries: wherein*—or for which reason—*they think it strange that ye run not with them into the same excess of riot; speaking evil of you.* These were the vices to which the Apostle seems to have alluded when he speaks of *ceasing from sin*, and of which, in the following verse, he says, they who practised them should *give an account to him who was ready to judge the quick and dead.*

There is a considerable difficulty in ascertaining with precision, what is meant by this last expression; for it has, at least, the semblance, especially when it is taken in connection with what follows, particularly with the Apostle's assertion in the 7th verse, that *the end of all was at hand*, as if he realy expected *the near approach of the end of the world.*

that it was for the like benevolent purpose that Noah *prepared an Ark*, that all who were disposed to listen to his preaching might flee to it, as to a place of refuge, from the impending Deluge.

This is so natural an interpretation of the word here rendered *a Prison*, and harmonizes so exactly with the context, and with the history to which it confessedly relates, that scarcely a single doubt can exist, in the mind of any impartial person, that this is the true meaning of the Apostle, even if no other could have been produced. But most fortunately there is still stronger evidence that this, and this *only* was the Apostle's meaning; for, in his Second Epistle, when speaking again upon this very subject, he uses the same word as a verb, to point out Noah's own preservation. And what is remarkable, our Translators have, very properly rendered it, *to save* in the sense of *preserving*. What better evidence can possibly be required of the Apostle's meaning, in the passage under consideration? Upon the use of the preposition joined with the word—the Reader will consult Dr. Blackwell to advantage.

* Or hath ceased from such sins as would subject him to the charge of suffering for evil doing. Hardy's Note is—Abstinet in posterum à peccatis.

The

The learned Dr. Benson has observed upon the expression —*who was ready to judge the quick and dead*, "that in "2 Cor. x. 6. the words which are rendered (having in a "readiness) signifie no more, than that St. Paul had full "power to revenge all disobedience, &c. though it doth not "appear that he ever exercised that power upon the *false "Apostle* or his faction." Again he refers to "Acts xxi. 13. "where to express his readiness, not only to be bound, but "to die for the cause of Christianity—he uses the same lan-"guage, though he certainly was not put to death at Jeru-"salem." He therefore concludes, from these examples, that "*having in a readiness*," * in the passage under consider-ation, "signifies no more, than that Christ had *full power* "to judge all mankind, though he had not yet exercised that "power." If this criticism be accurate, it will follow that the Apostle's language has no relation to any *particular time*, when he should judge the quick and dead—but simply to Christ's being invested with that important office.

With respect to the Apostle's assertion that *the end of all was at hand*—the judicious Reader is requested to observe what has before been noticed—that the Apostle Peter, in the first Chapter verse 5. speaks of *a Salvation which was* READY *to be revealed in* THE LAST TIME—that in the 7th verse, he intimates that their faith would be *tried with fire, at the revel-lation of Jesus Christ*, and that, in the 13th verse, he exhorts them *to hope to the end*—to entertain a firm expectation of *the grace which was about to be brought to them at the revelation of Jesus Christ*. It was also observed that St. Luke refers this complete revelation of the grace which was to be brought to the Gentiles, to *the destruction of Jerusalem*. Chap. xvii. 30. *As it was in the days of Noah—so shall it be when the Son of Man* IS REVEALED, i. e. when the true nature and design of the kingdom of the Messiah shall be fully un-folded.

By a reference to this language of the Apostle Peter, and of the Evangelist Luke—the judicious Reader will, perhaps, be strongly inclined to think that when the former speaks of *the end of all being at hand*, he meant only to assert *the near ap-proach of the destruction of Jerusalem*. This sense of the

* The Reader will pardon a slight deviation from Dr. Benson's words—to avoid the use of the Greek Character.

Apostle's

Apostle's language, appears to receive considerable confirmation from the Apostle's subsequent language, in the same chapter; for he again speaks of *the fiery trial* which was to try them, and of the time being NEAR * *when judgement must begin at the House of God*, and what is particularly worthy of notice, he says, verse 13. *That Christ's* GLORY SHALL BE REVEALED, *that they might be glad also with exceeding joy.*

With respect to the Second Epistle, Bishop Sherlock has observed that, "In the first chapter the Apostle endeavours "to re-establish and confirm the hopes of *Believers*; but he "does it with the air of one, who had been *reproached* for his "doctrine; *We have not*, say he, *followed cunningly devised* "*fables, when we made known to you the* POWER *and* COMING "*of the Lord Jesus*, chap. 1. 16. You see here the true "point upon which St. Peter placed the hopes and expec- "tations of true believers. In the second chapter he takes "notice of the *false teachers who brought in damnable heresies* "*denying the Lord that bought them*; these he threatens "with *swift destruction*, ver. 1. and tells them that, how- "ever they might conceive of the *promise* of *Christ's* speedy "*coming*, yet they would assuredly find that *their own* "*judgment* did not *linger*, nor their own *damnation slumber*, "ver. 3.—that it would *have been better for them, not to* "*have known the way of righteousness, than after they have* "*known it to turn from the holy commandment delivered to* "*them.* ver. 21. In the third and last chapter, he considers "the *scoffers*, and their irreligious insult, *Where is the pro-* "*mise of his coming?* ver. 4. He enters into their argument, "and shews them, from what had already happened in the "world, how perversely they reasoned about future things. "He concludes the whole with proper cautions to Christians, "when they consider and endeavour to understand the times "and seasons of God's judgments; and guards, not only his "own, but St. Paul's doctrine, † upon this article, *the*

* Our Translators have used the expression—*the time is come*—but the Greek is literally that "*the time is that judgment must begin*, &c. Hardy's Note is—*Tempus.* sub. instat sc. prædictum à Christo, Matt. xxiv. 21. Luke xxi. 21.

† The judicious and attentive Reader, who has considered what has been said upon St Paul's doctrine of *the coming of Christ*, in the preceding part of this work, cannot fail to be strongly impressed with this remark of the learned Prelate.

"*coming*

" *coming of Christ*, (so much was his mind bent to clear " this one point), against the *perverse* use of the *unlearned* " and *unstable*. ver. 15, 16.

" You see now what is the main, the only great point, in " this Second Epistle; it is the *coming of Christ* in *power* and " *glory*, to deliver the faithful, and to take vengeance of the " ungodly and unbelievers, as foretold by the Prophets under " both Testaments." And to shew still more fully and distinctly what the nature of *the coming of Christ*, of which the Apostle treats, in this Epistle is, he says that " if by the " *salvation ready to be revealed*, and *the day of visitation*, " and *the appearing of Jesus Christ*, in the First Epistle, we " are to understand the Apostle, as referring to the destruc- " tion of *Jerusalem*, then near at hand; we must necessarily " in the Second Epistle, understand the same thing, by the " POWER and COMING of our *Lord Jesus*. Which POWER " and COMING, was at the time of writing the Second Epistle, " so far from being over, that it is treated as a thing to " come." See pages 27, 28.

The present Bishop of London, in his Lectures on St. Matthew, on the contrary, in order to support his opinion, " that when our Lord said, Matt. xvi. 28. *Verily I say unto* " *you that there be some standing here, who shall not taste of* " *death till they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom*, he " meant only to intimate that a few of them should, before " their death, be favoured with a representation of the glori- " ous appearance of Christ and his Saints on that awful day. " And this illustrious scene," says the Bishop, " was actually " displayed to three of them, about six days after, in the " transfiguration on the Mountain." In proof of this, he farther says, " Indeed, St. Peter himself, who was present " at the transfiguration, plainly alludes to it, in a manner " which powerfully confirms this opinion. *We have not*, " says he, *followed cunningly devised fables when we made* " *known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus* " *Christ*. That is, our Lord's coming in his *kingdom* " with *power*, and *glory*, and *majesty*, to judge the world. " And how does St. Peter here prove that he will so come? " Why, by declaring that he and the two other Disciples, " James and John, were *eye witnesses of his Majesty*; that " is, they actually saw him on the mount, invested with " *majesty* and *glory*, similar to that which he would assume

" in

" in his kingdom at the last day. *For*, continues the " Apostle, *He received from God the Father*, HONOUR *and* " GLORY, *when there came such a voice to him from the ex-* " *cellent glory, this is my beloved Son, in whom I am well* " *pleased; and this voice, which came from heaven, we heard* " WHEN WE WERE WITH HIM IN THE HOLY MOUNT.

" This is St. Peter's own comment on the transfiguration, " in which he expressly compares Christ's *glory* and *majesty* " on the mount, to that which he will display in his final " advent, and considers the former as an emblem and an " earnest, and a proof of the latter." *

Such are the different and opposite representations of two men, who have, in their day, occupied the same exalted station, who have been distinguished for their learning and ability, and who, by their Writings, have shewn themselves, the zealous advocates of the Christian cause. But of two such opposite and discordant opinions, one of them, it is obvious, must be wrong, and as the perspicuity, both of the Evangelist and of the Apostle, is deeply involved in the question, whether *the present*, or *the late* Bishop of London has been mistaken; it will be necessary critically to investigate this matter; premising only that no offence is intended against the learned Prelate, who now so worthily occupies that exalted station.

This learned Prelate, in his xixth Lecture, in which he has considered the prediction of our Lord concerning *the destruction of Jerusalem*, has expressly admitted that " the " expressions made use of, *the sign of thy coming*, and *the* " *end of the world*, at the first view, naturally lead our " thoughts to *the coming of Christ* at *the day of judgment*, " and *the final dissolution of this earthly globe*. But," says he, " a due attention to the parallel passages in St. Mark and " St. Luke, and a critical examination into the real import " of those two phrases in various parts of Scripture, will " soon convince a careful enquirer, that by *the coming of Christ* " is here meant, not *his coming to judge the world at the last* " *day*, but *his coming to execute judgment upon Jerusalem*; † " and

* See the Bishop of London's Lectures on St. Matthew, Vol. II. p. 18, 19.

† See Mark xiii. 4. Luke xxi. 7. Matt. xxiv. 4. 5. xvi. 28. John xxi. 22. By the learned Prelate's referring here to Matthew xvi. 28. to prove Christ's

" and that by *the end of the world* is to be understood, not " *the final consummation of all things* here below, but THE " END of *that age*, the end of the Jewish state and polity, " the subversion of their City, Temple, and Govern- " ment." *

Now, if it be granted that the two Epistles of St. Peter were written BEFORE *the destruction of Jerusalem*—the prediction of our Lord that there would be *false Christs and false Prophets*, who should precede the awful calamity, seems very naturally to account for St. Peter's assertion, that there would be some who, *in the last days*, i. e. in the last days of the Jewish state, should say, *Where is the promise of his coming?* And it seems as naturally to account for his telling those to whom he wrote—*We have not followed cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our our Lord Jesus Christ*, and particularly, as he appears to have said it, as Bishop Sherlock has observed, " With the " air of one who had been *reproached* for his doctrine;" or of one who was apprehensive of the mischief which might arise from the insinuation of *the scoffers*, that *the prediction of his coming* would not be realized. That the Apostle did refer to *the approaching destruction of Jerusalem*, when he speaks of *the Salvation ready to be revealed*, and *the day of visitation*, and *the revelation of Jesus Christ*, was the opinion of Bishop Sherlock, and can scarcely be disputed; and that he should speak of *the coming of Christ*, and mention *the scoffers*, as saying, *Where is the promise of his coming, for since the Fathers fell asleep*, &c. will be considered, by all good judges of the nature of evidence, as among the most authentic proofs that *the destruction of Jerusalem* had not yet taken place, and of St. Peter's regard to our Lord's predictions concerning that awful event, as well as of his earnest solicitude to guard those to whom he wrote, against the infidel insinuations of their adversaries.

" coming to execute judgment upon Jerusalem," he appears not to have been aware of the question which he had formerly put, in his xvth Lecture, p. 17. and in his Essay on the Transfiguration of Christ, p. 16, when speaking particularly of this very verse; for, having quoted it, at full length, he says, " Is it not most natural, is it not almost necessary to understand these " similar expressions as relating to the same great event?"

For the true meaning of this verse---See the preceding part of this Work, pages 58 to 76.

* See Lecture xix. pages 139, 140.

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The Bishop has indeed said, " That St. Peter expressly " compares Christ's glory and majesty on the mount to that " which he will display in his final advent, and considers the " former as an emblem and an earnest, and a proof of the " latter." From thence he concludes, " That the scene upon " the mountain was a symbolical representation of Christ's " coming in glory to judge the world, and of the rewards " which shall then be given to the righteous." But where, it may be asked, with all due respect to the learned Prelate, has St. Peter compared Christ's *glory* and *majesty* on the mount to that which he will display in his final judgment? Or where considered the former as an emblem and an earnest, and a proof of the latter? He has indeed, asserted, that " When St. Peter says, *We have not followed cunningly de-* " *vised fables when we made known to you the* POWER *and* " COMING *of our Lord Jesus Christ*, that he means, our Lord's " coming in his *kingdom* with *power* and *glory*, and *majesty*, " to judge the world. And how," says the Bishop, " does " St. Peter here prove that he will so come? Why, by de- " claring that he and the two other Disciples, James and John, " were eye witnesses of his majesty; that is, they actually " saw him on the mount, invested with *majesty* and *glory*, " similar to that which he would assume in his kingdom at " the last day." But if the judicious and attentive Reader will refer to the history of the tranfiguration, he will not find any thing that has the most distant reference to any glory with which Christ was to be invested on the last day. His face, it is true, did shine as the Sun, and his raiment was white as the light. Moses and Elias appeared and conversed with him, and a voice came out of the cloud which said—*This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased*—but these were the only circumstances of *majesty* and *glory* alluded to in the history—or referred to, in the account given by St. Peter. But let the Reader form his own judgment from the two accounts, placed in opposite columns, and let him decide according to the evidence, what foundation the learned Bishop had to assert that Christ was " invested with *majesty* " and *glory*, similar to that which he would assume in his " kingdom at the last day"—or that St. Peter expressly compared Christ's *glory* and *Majesty* on the mount to that which he will display " in his final advent, and considers the " former as an emblem and an earnest, and a proof of the " latter."

Matthew xvii. 1—5.

And after six days Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into an high mountain apart. And was transfigured before them; and his face did shine as the Sun, and his raiment was white as the light. And behold there appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with him. Then answered Peter and said unto Jesus—Lord, it is good for us to be here: if thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias. While he yet spake, behold a bright cloud overshadowed them, and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said—This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him.

2 Peter i. 16, 17, 18.

We have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eye witnesses of his Majesty; for he received from God the Father, honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory—This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy Mount.

If the account of the transfiguration given by the Evangelist be considered, as an attestation of the truth of the character of Jesus as *the Messiah*, and as such it appears that it ought to be considered; it will probably not be difficult to understand the full force of the Apostle's Argument, and particularly that part of it which relates to *the more sure word of prophecy*, which does not appear to have been thoroughly understood, even by Bishop Sherlock; though it was one principle object of his discourses on prophecy to ascertain its meaning. *We have not*, says the Apostle, *followed cunningly devised fables*. And, as a proof of this, he says—*We were* EYE WITNESSES *of his majesty*, that is, of *his receiving from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice from the excellent glory—This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.* As a farther proof that they had not followed *cunningly devised fables*—he says—*This voice which*

which came from heaven WE HEARD *when we were with him in the holy mount.* Now, says the Apostle—We have not only seen and heard these things, whereby ye may know that we have not *followed cunningly devised fables*—but we have also the more sure word of prophecy—or rather *the word of prophecy*, concerning THE COMING OF THE MESSIAH, *more fully confirmed.* But how more fully confirmed? Why, by the signs which are now discernible of its *near approach; whereunto*, says the Apostle, *ye do*—or rather, ye will do *well to take heed as to a light shining in a dark place, and the Day Star*, or the Sun, * *arise in your hearts*, i. e. till the coming of the Son of Man, as *the Messiah*, shall be as visible *as the lightning which shineth from one end of heaven to the other.*

This interpretation may perhaps be considered as novel—but it is so natural, and accords so well with the time when the Epistle appears, from the internal evidence, to have been written, that there scarcely can exist the shadow of a doubt that this was the Apostle's meaning, and it is strongly confirmed by the declaration of this same Apostle, of *a Salvation* READY *to be revealed*,—by his mentioning *a day of visitation*—by his assertion that *the end of all things*, relative to the Jewish State and Nation, *was at hand*, and more particularly by his assurance that there would be *scoffers* who should say—*Where is the promise of his coming;*—the time being nearly expired in which the Messiah was expected, and no such person appearing, as they had represented to themselves, under *the character of the Messiah*, they would very naturally fall into a spirit of infidelity, and begin to say that *all things continued as they were from the foundation of the world.*

The Apostle Peter's reply to the question of these Scoffers—*Where is the promise of his coming?* is expressed in very strong language, and has by some, been thought inapplicable to *the destruction of Jerusalem*—but Dr. Lightfoot, whom Mr. Maltby has quoted, p. 4. as throwing "more light upon the "language and allusions of the sacred volumes, than almost "all other Commentators whatsoever," appears to have been particularly successful in shewing that the language of St. Peter was in common use, in antient prophecy, in describing temporal calamities.

The Reader will not perhaps be displeased to have the substance of what this very learned Writer has said, upon the

* The Greek word here translated *Day Star*, signifies that which bringeth light.

subject,

subject, laid before him, particularly as it will strongly confirm what has been said in the preceding pages. Speaking of *the destruction of Jerusalem*, he says, " it is set forth in " Scripture, in such expressions, as if it were the destruc- " tion of the whole world. Moses beginneth this style in " Deut. xxxii. 22. where he is speaking of that vengeance. " *A fire is kindled in mine anger, and it shall burn to the lowest* " *hell, and it shall consume the earth with her increase, and* " *set on fire the foundations of the Mountains.* So again, " Jeremiah iv. 23. *I beheld the earth, and lo it was without* " *form and void: and the heavens, and they had no light.* " *I beheld the mountains, and they trembled, and all the* " *hills were removed. I beheld, and lo, there was no man,* " *and all the birds of the heavens were fled.* In all these in- " stances, it might be imagined that the whole universe were " dissolving—but look but (in the latter instance) in the " 27th verse, and it speaks (of) no other than the dissolution " of that people, *for thus hath the Lord said. The whole* " *land shall be desolate.*

" In Matthew xxiv. 29—Our Lord says, *The Sun shall* " *be darkened, and the Moon shall not give her light, and* " *the Stars shall fall from Heaven, and the powers of the* " *Heavens shall be shaken, and then shall appear the sign* " *of the Son of Man,* &c. Who would not conclude that " these expressions related to *the dissolution of the world,* " *and Christ coming to Judgment*—yet the context plainly " intimates, that he only means the dissolution of the Jewish " state; for Christ expressly says, that *that generation should* " *not pass till all these things were fulfilled.*

" The beloved Disciple follows his Master's stile, upon " the very same subject, in the sixth of his Revelation, " where, after he had described the means of the destruction " of this wretched people, under the opening of certain " Seals, by sword, famine, and plague, he comes at last, in " ver. 12, 13, 14, to speak (of) their final dissolution itself, " in the very like terms. *The Sun became black as sackcloth* " *of hair, and the Moon became as blood. And the Stars of* " *Heaven fell unto the Earth, and the Heavens departed as a* " *scroll that is rolled together, and every Mountain and Island* " *were removed out of their places.* One would think the " final dissolution of all the world were spoken of—but look " in the 16th verse, and you find the very same words that

" our

" bur Saviour applies to the destruction of that people. " Luke xxiii. 30. *They said unto the montains fall on us,* " *and hide us*, &c. Our Apostle Peter's meaning is no " other when he speaks of *the Heavens being dissolved by fire,* " *the Earth, and the works therein* (being) *burnt up, and the* " *Elements melting with fervent heat.* By these expressions " he intends nothing more than the dissolving of their " church and economy, by fiery vengeance—the consump- " tion of their State by the flame of God's indignation, and " the ruine of their elements of Religion by God's fury. " Not the elements in Aristotle's sense, of fire, air, earth, and " water, but the elements in his brother Paul's sense, whom he " mentions presently after—the carnal and beggarly elements " of their Mosaic rites and traditionary institutions." *

The Reader hath now before him, an extensive and enlarged view of the Scripture doctrine of *the coming of Christ*, comprising, if not the whole, at least, the chief passages upon which the Historian of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire hath founded his charge of our Lord and his Apostles having predicted *the near approach of the end of the world in their own time.* And from this view it appears, with an evidence which is almost, if not altogether irresistible, that the language upon which the charge appears to have been founded, is so far from being objectionable, that it really contains, both in the case of our Lord and his Apostles, the strongest proofs which can reasonably be desired, of the genuine authenticity of their Writings.

From the nature of the controversy in which our Lord was necessarily engaged, and from the peculiar sentiments and prejudices of the whole Jewish Nation, concerning *the true nature of the Messiah's character*, (the Disciples of Jesus themselves not excepted), it was not possible for him, with any probability of success, to have adopted any other language than that which he did adopt. He could not say that he was *come*—or that he was *the Messiah*—having none of those proofs to offer, of his sustaining that character which they had uniformly affixed to it. His only alternative was, to keep hope alive—to confirm their expectations of *the coming of the Messiah*, and to give them such assurances of *his coming* as the peculiar exigencies and circumstances of

* See Lightfoot's Works, Vol. II. pages 1073, 1074.

things

things might require. These assurances were given upon those great occasions, particularly when they appear to have been absolutely and essentially necessary—when he at first gave them a commission to act as his Delegates and Apostles, attended with the most frightful and discouraging picture of the mighty opposition they must expect to meet with from their own countrymen, and of their being exposed to universal hatred for faithfully discharging the duties of their office—when he told them he was himself to be put to a most cruel and ignominious death, as an Impostor;—and lastly, when he foretold the total ruin of their country, and the entire destruction of their city and temple! Was it possible in any of these cases to tell them *explicitly* that he was *come*—or that notwithstanding what he had told them—they saw in him, the full accomplishment of all their expectations. To have used such a language, in such circumstances, would have been to strike at the root of all their dearest prejudices, and totally to have quashed their expectations of his being *the Messiah* whom they so ardently expected, and to have compelled them to have forsaken him, if not to have destroyed him, as *an Impostor*.

But by telling them of a fixed period, beyond which their expectations of *the coming of the Messiah* would not be deferred, attended with the most indubitable proofs of his being an extraordinary personage, they were encouraged to perseverance, and notwithstanding they were unable to reconcile what he had told them, with their ideas of *the nature of the Messiah's character*, to wait the issue of their attachment to him. The assurances of Jesus, that *they should not have gone over the cities of Israel, before the Son of Man*, the Messiah, *came*—that *there were some standing with him, who should not taste of death till they saw the Son of Man*, the Messiah, *coming in his kingdom*—and his declaring that *the kingdom of God should come in that generation*—being, in a particular manner, connected with the disclosure of the important events which were to happen, prove demonstrably that his object, in these assurances was, to encourage their expectation of *the coming of the Messiah*, and to prevent the effects which such discoveries had a natural tendency to produce!

If it be considered as an indubitable mark of the truth of an history, that the persons who are the subjects of that history, act in such a manner as the situation and circumstances

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of things necessarily require them to act—then it may without fear of contradiction be affirmed, that the Gospel history contains in it, every internal character of truth which the strictest scrutiny can require. This is so strongly exemplified, not only in the conduct of Jesus in the cases just mentioned, but in that of the Disciples likewise; and it is so ably represented by Mr. Maltby, that it will require no apology for presenting it to the Reader in his own words.

"We should," says he, "naturally expect at first to "meet the same sort of opinions and prejudices, in the Dis- "ciples of Jesus, as in their countrymen. We should expect "that these opinions would occasionally appear, and these "prejudices often start forth. We should expect to observe "marks of disappointment, when their worldly and carnal "views of the Messiah were discountenanced, and their own "hopes, founded upon those wrong conceptions, baffled "and crushed. We should expect to find these deeply "rooted prepossessions gradually and slowly worn out of "their minds, by the indubitable proofs which Jesus gave "of his being really the character which he professed to be— "we should expect to see them often returning to the charge, "as it were, and then retiring, at some fresh exertion of "miraculous power; rising again into full strength, when "any event occurred, which might seem to confound their "expectations; and not completely subdued, till after a "series of divine agency, which no pre-conceived opinions "whatsoever could possibly withstand. In short, we should "expect to find them resembling the rest of their country- "men, except in the opportunities they had of observing "more narrowly the character and works of Jesus, and in "having dispositions not so inveterately hostile to every "species of evidence. These, doubtless, would be our ex- "pectations; and if in the accounts, which are left of the "conduct of the more immediate followers of Jesus, we "meet with these marks of truth and nature, we are "bound in reason and in equity to receive their recorded "testimony." Pages 118, 119, 120.

By attending to the Gospels as Histories, and particularly as Histories of the great Controversy concerning the true nature of the Messiah's character, it has appeared with great force of evidence in the preceding pages, that the Disciples of Jesus did conduct themselves precisely in the manner which was to have been

 expected,

expected, and the more closely they are attended to *as histories* —the more numerous will be the proofs of this, and consequently the more irrefragable will be the evidences of their genuine authenticity, with all who are capable of judging of the nature of evidence. If they had been considered in this light, it would have been utterly impossible either for the friend or the enemy of Christianity to have conceived that Christ predicted *his second coming* in that generation; for it would have been seen, with an evidence which is not to be resisted by any one who possesses the smallest pretensions to candor, that the language upon which this opinion has been founded naturally arose out of the circumstances of the times, and of the difference of the character of the Messiah from that which the Jews had invariably affixed to it. It may confidently be affirmed, that if the Gospels be viewed in this light, they will not only, in many important instances, be unintelligible, and half their beauties be concealed, but a thousand internal evidences of their authenticity must inevitably escape the Reader's notice. The instance of the charge brought against our Lord, by the *Historian of* the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, and but too much countenanced by Divines of all descriptions, of Christ's having predicted his second coming in the clouds to judge all mankind, is one of the most striking proofs of this; for, if the represntation which has, in the preceding pages been made of this matter, shall be found to be correct, it must now appear that the language which he made use of to describe *his coming*, is among the most decisive and authentic evidences of *the truth of the History*. And what renders this evidence the more valuable and important is, that no lapse of time can lessen its force, or render it less capable of producing conviction. The importance therefore of viewing the Gospels in this light must be particularly striking, and must be attended with the most beneficial effects in banishing Scepticism and Infidelity, and in shewing, in a strong point of view, that Christianity is worthy of all acceptation!

With respect to the Epistles—the view which has, in the preceding pages, been given of them, establishes such a delightful harmony between them and the Gospels, and so completely does away all suspicion of the Authors of them, having expected *the end of the world* in their time, that the mouth of infidelity must become dumb, and the credit of the Apostles be

be established, as being well acquainted with the doctrine of their great Master with respect to *his coming*, and with the extensive designs of Christianity with respect to future ages.

The xxivth of Matthew and the parallel chapters are of particular importance, in consequence of our Lord's having connected with his prediction of *the destruction of Jerusalem*, the final proof of *the true nature of his character*, in opposition to the manner in which *the Jewish Nation* expected him to come. More attention, unquestionably, should have been given to these chapters, in this view, than has been given to them, as it would necessarily have pointed out the importance of ascertaining with precision their true meaning, and of keeping close to that meaning, in examining the Apostolic Epistles. Nothing can be more evident than that these chapters contain *the true Key* to the unlocking the genuine meaning of many important parts of the Epistles. A better proof of this cannot be given, than that all Commentators have, in their explanation of these Epistles, referred to those chapters—but, not having understood them, have made the Apostles speak a language which never was intended by them, and subjected them to the charge of having predicted *the near approach of the end of the world*, when in reality they were only reminding those to whom they wrote, of the near approach of *the destruction of Jerusalem*. That awful calamity had not then taken place, and the noticing it, in the particular manner they have done, must, in the estimation of all good judges of the nature of evidence, constitute a most striking proof of their authenticity. The earnestness with which our Lord pointed out *the signs* of its approach, and directed them to be particularly attentive to *those signs*, especially when connected with the declarations that *the destruction of Jerusalem*, would be the crowning proof of *the true nature of his character*, rendered it absolutely impossible for the Apostles, if they were faithful to their trust, not to make it the subject of their particular attention! For what reason else did our Lord dwell so much upon it as he appears to have done?

It may not be without its use, perhaps, to observe the gradation of language made use of by the Apostles in describing the approach of this awful calamity. In the Second Epistle to the Thessalonians, which has generally been supposed to have been written as early as the year fifty-two, the Apostle asserts, that *the day of Christ shall not come except there be an*

apostasy * *first*, &c. i. e. that certain signs would interveñe which had not yet appeared. The Epistle to the Philippians is supposed to have been written ten years later, and there St. Paul declares that it was *at hand*. In that to the Hebrews, which was written at a still later period, the Writer's language is—*The day is approaching—Yet a little while and he that shall come will come, and shall not tarry*. St. Peter, in his First Epistle, mentions particularly *the day of visitation*, and *the fiery trial*, and declares that *the end of all things was at hand*, and that *the time was come when judgment must begin at the house of God*. And St. John, in his First Epistle, intimates that it was still nearer, by saying, that it was *the last hour*, and that *there were many Antichrists, whereby they knew that it was the last hour*. These, the judicious and attentive Reader will consider, as decisive proofs of accuracy, and are, perhaps, among the best proofs of the time when the Epistles were severally written.

Of the accomplishment of this prediction no notice whatever is taken in any part of the New Testament, from whence it has, very properly been inferred, that the Epistles and Gospels were all written before it had taken place. But the faithful page of history written by Josephus, an unbelieving Jew—an eye-witness of the fatal issue of the war, fills up the chasm, and declares, with an evidence not easily to be resisted, that all things which Jesus foretold of *the destruction of Jerusalem*, were truly and literally fulfilled.

The present Bishop of London, speaking upon this subject, says, " we may safely consider this prophecy, as an " unquestionable proof of the divine fore-knowledge of our " Lord, and the divine authority of the Gospel; and on this " ground only, (were it necessary), we might securely rest the " whole fabrick of our Religion. Indeed this remarkable pre- " diction has always been considered, by every impartial per- " son, as one of the most powerful arguments in favor of " Christianity; and in our own times more particularly, a man

* In mentioning the opinion of the present Bishop of St. Asaph, Dr. Horsley, upon the subject of *the Man of Sin*; it was omitted to be observed that speaking of the Apostasy, as applied to *the Church of Rome*, he says it was, " a constructive Apostasy; never understood to be such by those to " whom the guilt has been imputed." And in this he appears to be right —but like most other Commentators, he understands *the Apostasy* in a *religious* sense. The criticism upon this word as used in the New Testament, in pages 199, 200, of this Work, is earnestly recommended to his attention.

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" of distinguished talents, and acknowledged eminence in his " profession, and in the constant habit of weighing, sifting, " and scrutinizing evidence, with the minutest accuracy, in " courts of justice, has publickly declared, that he considered " this Prophecy, if there were nothing else, to support " Christianity, as *absolutely irresistible.*" See the Bishop of London's Lectures, Vol. II. pages 180, 181. * And Mr. Erskine's Speech at the Trial of Williams, for publishing Paine's Age of Reason.

The prediction of Jesus concerning *the destruction of Jerusalem* being verified—not only his character as a true Prophet of God was established—but the great controversy concerning *the true nature of the Messiah's character* was finally settled; it being thereby proved that his coming as *the Messiah*, as he had told the Jewish Rulers upon his trial, would be *in clouds*—or *in vengeance*, instead of his coming to raise them to great worldly prosperity: Thus was the doctrine of *the first coming of Christ* fully established, and it may now be left to the judgment of the impartial part of mankind, whether the Historian of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire was not entirely mistaken, when he asserted that " the " near approach of the end of the world, had been predicted " by the Apostles, and that those who understood, in their " literal sense, the discourses of Christ himself, were obliged " to expect *the second and glorious coming of the Son of Man* " *in the clouds before that generation was totally extinguished*, " which had beheld his humble condition upon earth." He will see in the assertion of this Writer, that " for wise pur- " poses this error was permitted to subsist in the Church," nothing but a gross and ill founded libel on our holy religion, and that the doctrine of *the second coming of Christ* was emi-

* " The fidelity the veracity, and probity of Josephus," says the Bishop of London, " are universally allowed: and Scaliger in particular " declares, that not only in the affairs of the Jews, but even of foreign na- " tions, he deserves more credit than all the Greek and Roman Writers put " together. Certain at least it is, that he had that most essential qualification " of an historian, a perfect and accurate knowledge of all the transactions " which he relates; that he had no prejudices to mislead him in the repre- " sentation of them; and that above all, he meant no favor to the Christian " cause. For even allowing the so much controverted passage, in which he " is supposed to bear testimony to Christ, to be genuine, it does not appear " that he ever became a convert to his religion, but continued, probably, " a zealous Jew to the end of his life." See his Lectures, Vol. II. page 175.

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nently calculated for wise purposes, not for a short period of time only, but for the support of the faith and prac ice of Christians in all ages of the world, and that the more closely the mysterious language of Prophecy and Revelation, upon this subject, is pressed—the more clearly it will appear to be a doctrine every way worthy of God, and worthy of the acceptation of mankind. It has been considered, imperfectly as it has hitherto been understood, as deserving of credit, by men of the most enlightened understandings which the world ever saw—by men who are not destitute of candor, of judgment, or of fidelity—by men who are not inferior in these qualities, to those who have espoused the opposite party.

It is difficult to resist transcribing largely from the Writer from whom these last words are taken, but the whole of the passage is so well worth attention, that it is here presented to the Reader as no improper conclusion of the Work.

" The Character of our Lord is a subject which has occu-
" pied the thoughts, and exercised the talents, of the wisest
" and best men in every age, since his religion was first an-
" nounced to the world. It is a subject which could not
" fail to be investigated by those, who have professedly con-
" sidered how far his pretentions, as a divine teacher, were
" founded in truth. Accordingly, they who have asserted,
" as well as they who have denied, that he was commissioned
" from on high, have scrutinized his actions with the most
" diligent and anxious care. The result of the investigations,
" employed by the former, is of course highly favourable to
" the character of Jesus; since they could not otherwise
" have conceived him deserving of the sacred title of a Pro-
" phet, authorised to communicate so full and so important
" a revelation of the will of God to his creatures. But not-
" withstanding their belief in his divine mission, their
" authority is not to be neglected, nor the reasons, upon
" which their conclusions are founded, therefore to be dis-
" regarded—even by those, who would take a survey of the
" evidences of this religion, upon grounds the most impar-
" tial, and with views the most liberal. If indeed any symp-
" toms of incapacity, of prejudice, of unfairness, appear in
" the course of their investigations, we may then lay aside
" their testimony; as we should be justified, for the same
" reasons, in laying aside that of the historians, who supply
" materials for the enquiry. But if the Writers who have

finally

" finally rested their faith on the pretensions of Jesus are
" not destitute of candour, of judgment, of fidelity; if
" they are not inferiour in these qualities to those, who have
" espoused the opposite party; their conclusions are entitled
" to our acquiescence, and their authority to our deference,
" as much as those of any other Writers, upon any other
" subject of science or of morals. We might therefore boldly
" appeal to our adversaries, whether they can disprove
" the conclusions which Law, and White, and Newcome,
" have drawn in favour of the exemplary virtue of Jesus.
" Nor should the vulgar consideration, that these Writers
" were Priests, and therefore interested in drawing the conclu-
" sions for which they have contended, detract from the weight
" of their observations, or the soundness of their arguments.
" If, as Priests, they be supposed to lean towards the cause of
" a profession, which is sometimes attended with emolument
" or distinction; yet the mere wish to serve a particular
" cause, would not enable them to establish a position,
" which must look for support to a series of historical testi-
" mony. It would not enable them to wrest facts to their
" purpose, which are inscribed in the unvarying records of
" past ages; it would not enable them to suppress or dis-
" tort evidence, which is interspersed in the writings of men
" of every party, and of every country; it would not enable
" them to produce those internal marks of truth and nature,
" to which they have appealed, in confirmation of their opi-
" nions. Nothing but conviction could have impelled so
" many Writers to handle the same subject, to place it in so
" many different lights, to support it with such unaffected
" zeal, and such overpowering argument. We may more-
" over remark, that not merely Priests of an Established
" Church, whose situation sometimes leads to wealth and
" and consequence; but Priests of every Sect—Priests who-
" have nothing to expect but opposition, if they are known;
" or poverty, if they are not known—nay, Priests who have
" altogether abandoned their profession—men, in short, of
" the most discordant views, and hostile sentiments, have
" still supported, with uniform conviction, and maintained
" with unvarying ardour, the truth of the Christian dispen-
" sation. In this latter description of Writers, we may
" remark the names of Priestley, Wakefield, and Evanson;
" of men, who differing from each other, as much as they

" dissent

" dissent from the National Church, yet, upon the same
" general grounds of historical truth, admit the divine origin
" of Christianity. Nor must we fail to reply, if the objection
" should still be urged pertenaciously, that Laymen of the
" most distinguished abilities, and of the most enlarged views,
" have, in all ages, vied with Churchmen in the pious and
" useful labour of fixing, upon the solid basis of reason and
" truth, the credibility of the Gospel History. So far then
" as their statements are built upon facts, and their conclu-
" sions logically deduced, there is no pretence for with-
" holding assent to the arguments in favour of the Character
" of Jesus, though they chance to fall from the pen of a
" Priest or a Prelate.

FINIS.

APPENDIX, No I.

Of the Meaning of the Phrase THE END OF THE WORLD—*or* AGE—*as made Use of by St. Matthew, Chapter* XXIV.

IT was observed, in the examination of the meaning of this chapter, p. 90. that there seems to be good reason for thinking that the phrase *the end of the world* signifies, not *the final judgment of the world*—but *the end of the Jewish dispensation*—or *the destruction of Jerusalem*; to which the prediction of our Lord, which gave occasion to the questions of the Disciples, most indisputably was confined.

It appears to be one good argument that this was the meaning of the Evangelist, in this place, that as the learned University Preacher has observed—"by comparing St. Luke "with St. Matthew, we discover that the two questions of "the latter relate entirely to one subject; the first to *the* "*time* when the vengeance was to be inflicted—the second to "*the signs* which were to precede its execution."

But besides this—other evidence is not wanting to prove that *the end of the world* sometimes signifies, in the New Testament, *the end of the age*, during which the Jewish church and state were to last. The learned Bishop Pearce has produced two passages of this nature, from the Epistles, which are submitted to the judicious Reader's candid consideration, together with such remarks upon the connection of the Writer's arguments, as seem strongly to corroborate this meaning.

The first passage to which the learned Bishop refers is, 1 Cor. x. 11. *All these things*, viz. (the things of which the Apostle had before been speaking) *happened to them for examples, and they are written, for our admonition, upon whom* THE ENDS OF THE WORLD *are come*. The Bishop's Note upon this passage is as follows: "St. Paul," says he, "did not imagine that *the end of the world* was *at hand*, as "some Commentators have much to his prejudice supposed: "He only alluded to the Jewish distinction of time." The other passage is, in the Epistle to the Hebrews, chap. ix. 26. *Now once, in* THE END OF THE WORLD *hath he*, the Messiah,

 appeared

appeared to put away sin, by the sacrifice of himself; which phrase, says the Bishop, relates not to *the end of the world*, but to the preceding age's being ended. See Bishop Pearce on 1 Cor. x. 11.

It has been suggested, by an eminent Critic, that these passages are equally doubtful, as to their genuine meaning, as that which they are intended to support, and that therefore they cannot, satisfactorily, establish the meaning which is here contended for. But, if the current of the Apostle's argument be closely attended to; it will appear to be strongly in favor of this sense; for his principal object, most unquestionably, was, to contrast the Mosaic and the Christian Dispensation against each other, with a particular view to draw a conclusion to the advantage of the latter, both in point of *excellence* and *duration*.

Of the superior excellence of *the Christian Dispensation*, in the estimation of the Author of this Epistle, some judgement may be formed, from the magnificent description which he has given of the great founder of it; in which he seems to have laboured for expressions, sufficiently strong, to express his sense of the value of it. chap. *i.* 1—5. *God, who at sundry times, and in divers manners, spake unto the Fathers by the Prophets, hath in these last days* * *spoken to us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all*—i. e. of all former dispensations, *by*—or for *whom he made* THE WORLDS, or *Ages*—the same word used by St. Matthew; *who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power,*

* *The last days, the last times*, and *the latter times*, are phrases which are, generally, if not always, used in the Epistles, to denote the concluding period of the Jewish Œconomy: And it is a remark of Dr. Benson upon 1 John ii. 18. that "if the Apostle had said that the *last day*, or *hour*, of "the world was then just at hand, he had said what was not true. We "know that almost 1700 years have run out since, and that *the last hour* of "the world is not yet come."

Mr. Pierce of Exon, on this passage, Heb. i. 1. says—"This, or the "like Phrase, is often met with in the Old Testament," to many of which he particularly, refers. "And," he adds, "the like we find in the New "Testament also. Acts ii. 17. 1 Tim. iv. 1. 2 Tim. iii. 1. 1 Pet. i. 20. "2 Pet. iii. 3. These *last days* were, understood, by the *Jews* to signify "the days of the King Messiah. And that this is the meaning of such "phrases, may easily appear to such as will consult the learned Mr. Joseph "Mede upon this argument, in his *Apostasy of the latter times*, chap. xi, "xii, &c."

when

when he had by himself purged our Sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high; being made so much better than the Angels, as he hath, by inheritance, obtained A MORE EXCELLENT *name than they.*

With respect to the duration of the Christian Dispensation, the same Writer, having quoted a Prophecy from the Old Testament, of *a new Covenant* which was afterwards to be established, meaning thereby *the Christian Covenant*, draws this conclusion from the abrogation of the former, chap. viii. 17. *In that he saith* A NEW COVENANT, *he hath made the first* OLD. *Now that which* DECAYETH *and waxeth* OLD, *is ready to vanish away;* plainly intimating, by this reasoning, that *the New Covenant* was not *soon* to vanish away. And this language perfectly harmonizes with that which is contained in Antient Prophecy; which constantly describes, either in express words—or in words to that effect, *the kingdom of the Messiah*, as *an everlasting kingdom*, and as that which shall not be destroyed—but be productive of the happiest effects upon the moral and religious condition of mankind.

But it may be observed farther that, if the passage in the Hebrews, quoted by Bishop Pearce, be examined with attention; it will of itself furnish no slight proof, that *the end of the world*—or age, can be understood only of *the first coming* of Jesus as *the Messiah*—or to speak more properly, to *the end of the Jewish dispensation:* for *the appearance of Jesus to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself*, no one can doubt, can only mean, his *first coming*—as *the Messiah*, and his dying upon the Cross, and is most clearly and accurately distinguished, by this circumstance, from his *second coming*, which was to be *without sin unto salvation*, and that at *the day of Judgment*. This sacrifice, the Writer to the Hebrews says, was not like *the Sacrifices which were under the law*, to be repeated frequently—it was sufficient that it was made ONCE. *Now once, in* THE END OF THE WORLD—or in THE END OF THE AGE *hath he*, the Messiah, *appeared to put away sin, by the sacrifice of himself. And, as it is appointed to men once to die, but after this the Judgment—so Christ*—or the Messiah, *was once offered to bear the sins of many, and*, in consequence of that one sin offering—*to them that look for him*, as he has taught all Christians to do, *shall he appear, the second time, without sin unto salvation.*

In the other passage, 1 Cor. x. 11. to which Bishop Pearce refers—the Apostle Paul asserts, that the Mosaic dispensation had, a manifest reference to the Christian. Verse 1. *All our Fathers*, says he, *were under a cloud, and all passed through the sea and were all baptized unto Moses, in the cloud and in the sea. And did all eat the same spiritual meat, and did all drink the same spiritual drink; for they drank of that spiritual rock that followed them, and that rock was Christ. But*, says the Apostle, *with many of them, God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown* for their disobedience, *in the Wilderness. Now*, says he, *these things were our examples*—or beacons—*to the intent that we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted.*

In the 8th and following verses, the Apostle enumerates several instances of this disobedience, and then again repeats what he had before said in the 6th verse. *Now these things happened unto them for examples, and they are written for our admonition, upon whom* THE ENDS OF THE WORLD *are come.* As if he had said. If the Jews, under the Mosaic and more imperfect dispensation, did not escape the punishment due to their disobedience—still less reason could they have to expect to escape, who were under a more perfect one.

From these instances, it appears, that the phrase *the end of the Jewish dispensation*—or rather, perhaps, the last dispensation in which God should reveal himself to mankind, and as such, should not be neglected or misimproved—but thankfully and cordially received, and be productive of a conduct becoming its superior excellence.

It must indeed be owned that the same phrase is used in Matthew xiii. 39, 40, 49. and can hardly be applied to any other event than to *the end of the world*, in the strictest sense of the word; but it is submitted to the judicious Reader, whether the instances produced from the Epistles will not justify the interpreting it differently in Matt. xxiv. 3. If it will not—the only alternative is, that the Apostles may have thought, when they put the question, *What shall be the sign of the end of the world?* that their Temple would not be destroyed but with the world itself. But our Lord, in his answer, confirms the prediction which gave rise to their questions, and tells them, that it would be destroyed *in that generation!*

APPENDIX, No II.

Of the Meaning of the word GENERATION.

IT was observed in page 122, that the only possible objection to the reasoning which was adopted in endeavouring to ascertain the meaning of the xxivth of Matthew, and the parallel chapters was, that the word *Generation* is capable of a very different meaning, and it is here proposed minutely to enquire, whether there is any solid foundation for abandoning the common acceptation of that word. This will be the more necessary, as Dr. Lightfoot appears, very properly to have termed it, "The Gnomon," or Index to those chapters, and as, till this matter is ascertained with some degree of precision, some doubt may still be entertained of the true meaning of those chapters.

Mr. Mede, in his reply to Mr. Hayn's fourth Letter, has observed, that the Greek word translated *Generation*, "signifies, not only Ætas, but Gens, Natio, Progenies, and so "ought to be taken; viz. Gens Judæorum non interibit, "usque dum omnia hæc implentur. *The Nation of the Jews "should not perish, till all these things were fulfilled.*" And a little farther on he says, "No one can deny, but this is one of "the native notions of the Greek word translated *Generation*, "yea, and so taken in the Gospels, as in the foregoing "chapter, Matt. xxiii. 36. *Verily I say unto you, all these "things shall come upon this Nation.* So Beza renders it "twice in the parallel place, Luke xi. 50, 51, and seven "times in this Gospel. Again, Luke xvii. 25. *The Son of "Man must be first rejected*—Beza à gente ista."

A learned Writer, in a private letter to the Author, has observed, that the Greek word translated *Generation* "cannot "signify *Age*—or the people of a particular Age, (in Matt. "xxiv. and the parallel chapters)—but a Nation, Race, Family,—or a certain description of people.—Thus Psalm "xiv. 5. xxii. 30. xxiv. 6. lxxiii. 15. cxii. 2. So in the "New Testament, Matt. iii. 7. xii. 34. xxiii. 33. it is not "*age of vipers*—but a nest, a brood, a family, a nation of "vipers. In Phil. ii. 15. it is properly rendered Nation, as "I think it should, in several other places, or by some "similar

" similar word, as *people*, &c. Among others, Matt. xi. 16. " xvii. 17. Acts ii. 40."

This Writer having adduced these instances, says, " Now " it being admitted that the word *Generation* here, in our " Lord's discourse, (Matt. xxiv.), *may* mean *the Jewish* " *Nation*—or *people*—almost every difficulty vanishes. This, " Sir, I think, deserves your very attentive consideration."

It will, perhaps, very much contribute to throw light upon our Lord's meaning in the use of the word *Generation* in the xxivth of Matthew and the parallel chapters—first to attend to the nature of the prediction which gave rise to this discourse;—Secondly, to some particulars, in our Lord's answer to the questions of the Disciples;—And thirdly, to the use of the term *Generation*, in other parts of the Sacred Writings, and particularly in the New Testament; together with the design which Jesus appears to have had in view, in the frequent use of this term.

1st. With respect to *the nature of the prediction* which gave rise to this discourse—whatever ambiguity there may appear to be in the questions of the Disciples, in consequence of that prediction—there certainly can be none in the prediction itself. No one can possibly doubt that it related to *the destruction of Jerusalem*, and to the destruction of Jerusalem *only*. This event, it is well known, took place in the age in which this prediction was delivered—or in *that Generation*, in the common acceptation of the word, and consequently there arises, from hence, a strong presumption, that our Lord made use of the word *Generation* in that sense,

If again, 2dly, The question of the Disciples—*When shall these things be?* be considered in connection with our Lord's answer to it—the presumption that this was his meaning, will be rendered still stronger—for the rising of *Nation against Nation*—the preaching of *the Gospel*—or good news *of the Kingdom*, i. e. of *the Kingdom of the Messiah*, and *the seeing of the abomination of desolation*—are mentioned as particular signs of the near approach of *the destruction of Jerusalem*, and upon the last of these signs being mentioned—the direction to the Disciples is given in the following unambiguous terms;—*Then let those who are in* JUDEA *flee to the mountains.* And having in the 29th and following verses, described the awful and desolating effects of these calamities, he, in the 33d verse, says,—*When ye shall see all these things*

things, viz. all the things which he had before been describing—*know that it*—or as it is in St. Luke, that *the kingdom of God*—or of *the Messiah, is near, even at the doors.* This, it must be particularly observed, is an explicit answer to the question of the Disciples—*What shall be the sign of thy coming*, i. e. of the coming of the Messiah—or of the coming of the kingdom of God? Then follows the solemn asseveration in question, which clearly appears to be a direct and explicit answer to their other question—*When shall these things be—Verily I say unto you—This generation shall not pass till all these things be fulfilled.* Here it seems to be evident, that *these things*, in the question of the Disciples, have a direct and exclusive reference to their Master's prediction of the destruction of Jerusalem—*the seeing all these things*, in the 33d verse, appears to have as direct a reference to the question of the Disciples—*When shall these things be?* and consequently, *all these things*, having a distinct and unambiguous reference to *the things* which had before been described—the term *Generation* must necessarily have been used to signify—*the people of that age.*

But there is still farther evidence that our Lord used the term *Generation* in the common acceptation; for when he says, ver. 37. *As the days of Noah were*, &c.—is there not the strongest reason for thinking that he referred to this important piece of History, to point out to them, that *the destruction of Jerusalem* would be equally sudden and unexpected with the destruction of Sodom. * The ablest Commentators appear to

* The learned person last referred to, as well as Mr. Mede, intimates "that *the coming of Christ*, and of *the kingdom of God*, sometimes signify "Christ's appearing in the way of providential judgments on the Jews, "and the establishment of the Christian dispensation, cannot be doubted, "and in this sense, Jesus Christ did come more 1700 years ago—but this "his *coming* is not," he says, "what is more eminently meant by this "phrase in general; and that order of things, or age, or dispensation, which "we still look for, is, in Scripture, more especially, called *the kingdom of "God*—of *Christ*—and of the *Saints*. And this is that *coming of the Son of "Man* which Daniel saw and prophesied of, and not *his coming* 1700 years "ago. *The coming of the Son of Man*, which Daniel prophesies of, is to "destroy the beast—the little horn, &c. and which is to be in the latter "days, when the kingdom of the Saints is to commence. Of the same "coming our Lord appears here to speak, in his prophetic discourse, when "he borrows the language of Prophecy to represent that event.

In the preceding pages, this opinion has been controverted, (see p. 114, &c.) and it is unnecessary to make any additions to what was there advanced, except

to be agreed, that this and what follows is spoken of *the destruction of Jerusalem*, and *the coming of the Son of Man*, mentioned in the 37th and 39th verses, and that it has a plain reference to the manner of *the coming of the Messiah*, viz. as in *the days of Noah*, in opposition to the manner in which the Jews expected him to come, can hardly be doubted.

But 3dly, If the meaning of the word *Generation*, in other passages of the Sacred Writings, be examined with attention, —the evidence of its true meaning, in the passage under consideration, will probably be much increased, even though it should appear that it is sometimes used, in a different sense.

Nothing can be more to the purpose than what Dr. G. Benson has said upon this subject, and therefore no apology will be necessary for presenting it to the Reader. "The "word translated *Generation*," he says, "signifies *an Age*, "in very many places of the *Septuagint*. So *one Generation* "signifies one *Age*. Psalm, cix. 13. Eccles i. 4. Isaiah "xxxiv. 17. *Another Generation* signifies *another Age*, or "the children that should rise up after them, Deut. xxix. "22. Jud. ii. 10. Psalm xlviii. 13. and lxxviii. 4, 6. and "cii. 18. and cxlv. 4. *From Generation to Generation* sig-"nifies *from Age to Age*, Isaiah li. 8. Lam. v. 19. Dan. iv. "34. Joel iii. 20. *All the Generation* signifies *all the Men* "*of that Age*. Numb. xxxii. 13. Deut ii. 14. *The fourth* "*Generation* signifies *the fourth Race*, or succession of Men, "from the time then present. Gen. xv. 16. Job xlii. 16. "*The tenth Generation* signifies *the tenth Age, or race of* "*Men, from the time then spoken of.* Deut. xxiii. 3. *A thou-*"*sand Generations* signifies *one thousand Ages.* Psalm cxv. "8. *Many Generations* signifies *many Ages.* Psalm lxi. 6. "Isaiah lviii. 12. and lx. 15. Joel ii. 2. *All Generations* "signifies *every Age.* Psalm xlv. 17, &c. And *this Genera-*"*tion* signifies *this Age*, or *this present Race of Men.* "Gen. vii. 5."

In the *New Testament*, *a Generation* signifies *one age.* Matt. i. 17. Luke i. 48, 50. Acts xiii. 36. and xiv. 16. and xv. 21. Eph. iii. 15. Col. i. 26. And *this Generation* signifies *this age.* Matt. xi. 16. and xii. 41, 42, 45. and xxiii. 36.

cept that when men differ so widely as to the general object of the xxivth of Matthew and the parallel chapters, they should interpret the word *Generation* in such opposite senses. Let the Reader judge for himself, which is, in this instance, the true one.

Mark

Mark viii. 12, 38. Luke vii. 31. and xi. 29, 30, 31, 32, 50, 51. and xvii. 25.

To the like purpose Dr. Whitby, speaking of Matt. xxiv. 34. says,—"These words—*this age*, or *generation, shall not* "*pass away*, afford a full demonstration that all which *Christ* "had mentioned, hitherto, was to be accomplished, not at "the time of *the conversion of the* Jews—or at the final judg- "ment—but in that very age—or whilst some of that gene- "ration of men lived; for," the words translated, "*this* "*Generation*, never bear any other sense in the New Testa- "ment than *the Men of this Age*. So Matt. xi. 16. *To* "*whom shall I liken the Men of this Age?* xii. 42. *The* "*Queen of the South shall rise up in judgment with the Men* "*of this Age*,—and ver. 45. *So shall it be with the wicked of* "*this Age*. xxiii. 36. *All these things shall come upon the* "*Men of this Age*. Mark viii. 12. *Why do the Men of this* "*Age seek a sign? No sign shall be given to the Men of this* "*Age*. Luke vii. 31. *To whom shall I liken the Men of this* "*Age?* xi. 29. *The Son of Man shall be a sign to the Men* "*of this Age*. And Acts ii. 40. *Save yourselves from this fro-* "*ward Generation.*"

But perhaps there cannot be a more decisive and satisfactory method of ascertaining the true meaning of the word *Generation*, as made use of by our Lord, than by considering what was his design in making such frequent use of the term. Mr. Mede has said, "That his design was to assert the con- "tinuance of the Jewish Nation. Verily I say unto you— "the Jewish Nation, even to the wonder and astonishment "of all who consider it, remains a distinct people in so long "and tedious a captivity, and after so many wonderful "changes as have befallen the Nations where they live." This is, doubtless, a most wonderful circumstance, in the history of mankind.—But is it probable that, in a chapter, the principal object of which, most unquestionably was, to pronounce the most tremendous woes on *the Jewish nation* for their crying iniquities, he should tell them that they should still continue to be a nation. His object seems rather to have been, to stigmatize the Jews who lived in his own time, as more wicked than any of their ancestors, since they had been a nation, in order, as it should seem, to vindicate the providence of God, in the remarkable judgments which were coming upon them.

When John the Baptist called the Jews *a generation of Vipers;* it can hardly be imagined that he had any view, but to the flagitious character of *the people of that Age.* And, it is remarkable, that when Jesus afterwards adopted the same language; it was, in one instance, in consequence of the Pharisees having, most wickedly and maliciously accused him of being in league with Beelzebub, the Prince of Demons, because he had wrought a most astonishing miracle of beneficence in their presence: And, in another, when having at considerable length, drawn the character of the Scribes and Pharisees, he says,—*Ye Serpents,—Ye Generation of Vipers,—how can ye escape the damnation of Hell?* Could he mean any thing more than that the Jews of that Age were of that Character, and would suffer that punisment? And, if not, what other meaning can be put upon his words, in this connection, in the 36th verse, than that by the phrase *this Generation* he meant *the Men of the Age* in which he lived? With a like view, our Lord seems to have termed those who *sought after a sign,* and those who *rejected a greater than Solomon—an evil and adulterous Generation.* And it was of those who stiled him *a Glutton and a Drunkard—a friend of Publicans and Sinners,* that he said—*To whom shall I liken this Generation?* Nor is it less natural to suppose, that when the Apostle Peter said —*Save yourselves from this untoward Generation,* he is to be understood rather, of the Men of *that Age,* than of *that Nation.*

Mr. King, the Author of Morsels of Criticisms, has objected to the common interpretation of the word *Generation* upon a different ground, viz.—"That if the words must "really be taken as usually understood by Commentators, to "signify the aggregate of the persons then living; it is difficult, and almost impossible to say what could be deemed, "*the Generation then existing,* considering the constant succession that there is of the human species, in every, even "the shortest period of years. Who were the persons, and "at what Age of Life are we to begin to reckon with regard to "those who were to form the *Generation* that was not to "pass away till *the destruction of Jerusalem?*"

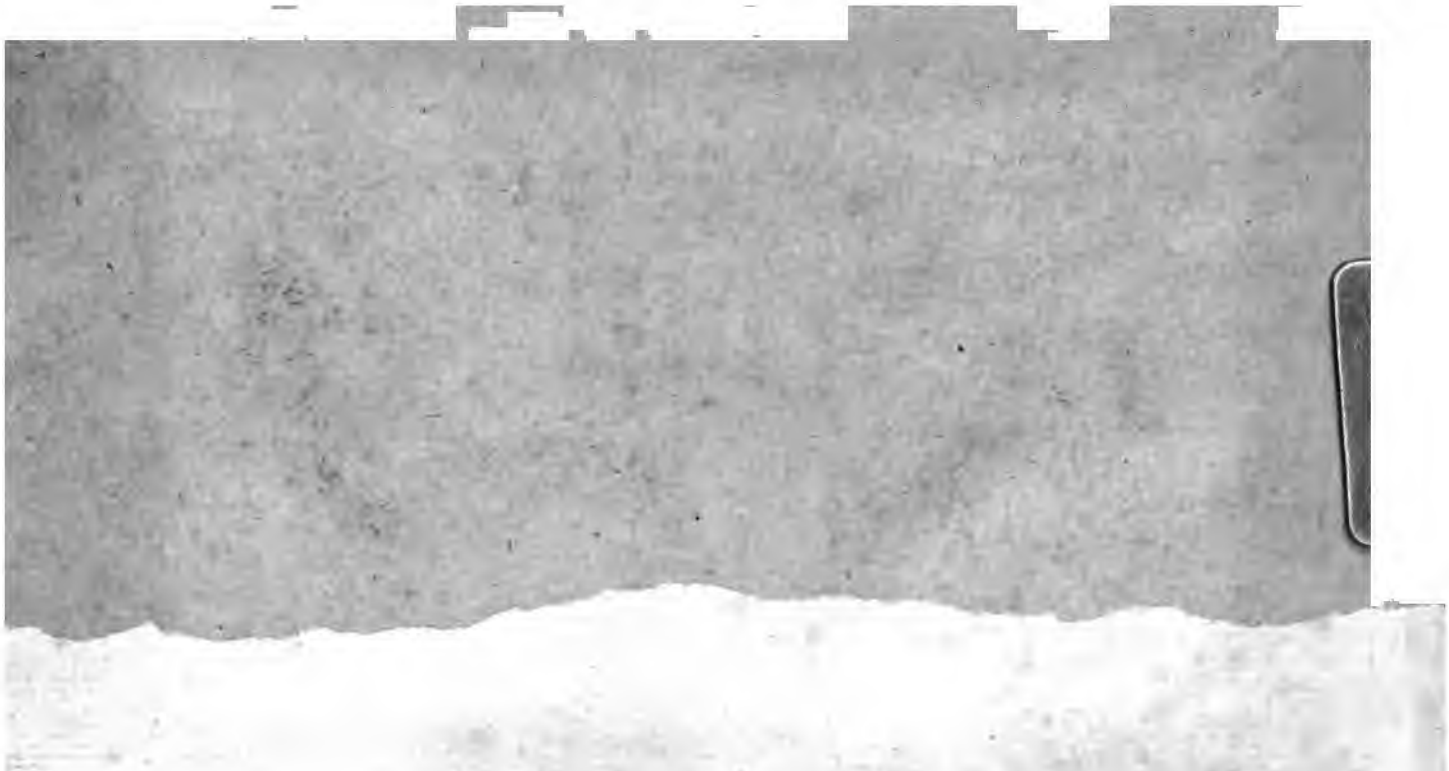
The good intentions of Mr. King will not be disputed, and his piety is said to be exemplary;—but without detracting from his merit as a worthy and respectable character, it may be said that, if he had really determined to play the sophist, and

and to throw obscurity upon what every man of common understanding has a sufficiently clear idea of, he could not have said any thing more to the purpose; for who does not perceive that *this generation* means the aggregate of the people who are *now living*, in opposition to those who *have lived*, and are now *no more*, and to those who shall succeed them, and who are therefore very properly termed *the past* and *the future Generations*? Besides, from the examples which have been produced, particularly from Dr. Benson; it was evidently the common language of Scripture, in passages which are perfectly free from ambiguity, and it is in fact the common language of Mankind.

The judicious and attentive Reader is now, it may be presumed, in possession of materials sufficient to enable him to determine whether Mr. Mede's sense of the word *Generation*—or the *common one*, is the most proper. The learned Dr. Benson, after having collected the numerous passages here cited, and having observed that more such Authorities might be collected from the New Testament, very properly asks—"Why the word *Generation* should not be taken in "its usual signification in this place? Especially as, in that "sense, it contains a plane answer to the question of the "Disciples. But, if it be interpreted of the Jewish Nation, "it is no answer at all." And a little lower, having cited "the question of the Disciples, viz.—"*When shall these "things be?* i. e. When shall the temple be destroyed, so "that one stone shall not be left upon another? When shall "such a desolation come," he says, "To that our Lord "answers, by setting before them several of the signs and "tokens of its approach; and by describing the desolation "itself. And then he adds, *This Generation shall not pass "away, till all these things be fulfilled. Heaven and Earth "shall sooner pass away, than any of my words fail of being "accomplished.* But what answer to that question would it "be to say, The Jews shall continue a distinct people, down "to the Day of Judgment, or to the End of the World? "Or according to Dr. Mede, 'The Nation of the Jews "shall not perish till all these things be fulfilled?' What "answer (I say) would that be, to the question put by the "Disciples? Or how would such a declaration connect with "the preceding, or following context,

"Ver.

" Ver. 32, &c. Our Savior intimates, that some of his " Disciples should live to see the signs and forerunners of " that desolation, which was coming upon the Jews. And " accordingly, he sais, *Now learn a parable from the fig-tree.* " *When its branch is yet tender, and it putteth forth leaves,* " *then you know that Summer is near. So also, ye, when ye* " *shall see all these things, know ye that it is near, even at* " *the doors. Verily I say unto you,* THIS GENERATION " SHALL NOT PASS AWAY TILL ALL THESE THINGS BE " FULFILLED. *Heaven and Earth shall pass away; but* " *my words shall not pass away.* Now, what connection " has the Jews continuing a distinct people, throughout all " Ages, with the signs and forerunners of that amazing " desolation? Or with the rest of our Savior's discourse in " that place?" See Dr. Benson's Essay concerning the Unity of the Sense of Scripture, prefixed to the Second Volume of his Paraphrase, pages xxix, xxx. And Watson's Tracts, Vol. IV. pages 500, 501.

THE END.

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